

Monthly Journal of Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

JUNE 2005

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Internet edition at: www.advaitaonline.com

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Cover: The Renovated Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre; inset: Swamiji's Birthplace



Mahasamadhi of SRIMAT SWAMI RANGANATHANANDAJI MAHARAJ



With profound sorrow we announce the mahasamadhi of Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, the thirteenth President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 25 April 2005 at 3.51 p.m. Most Revered Maharaj was ninety-six.

Tell that boy (swimming in the river) this is not Malabar, said the venerable old sadhu, standing on the balcony of the Belur Math building overlooking the ghat on the Ganga. His radiant face was beaming with affection. The old sadhu was none other than Srimat Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj, popularly known as Mahapurush Maharaj, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the second President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. The boy—with whom swimming was a passion—was his seventeen-year-old disciple Shankaran. In retrospect, Mahapurushji had good reason to be solicitous, for Shankaran was destined to have an illustrious career as a monk. Having initiated him into spiritual life with mantra diksha in 1926, Mahapurushji was to confer the brahmacharya vows on Shankaran Kutty in 1929, naming him Yatichaitanya, and later, in 1933, invest him with the sublime sannyasa vows, following which he came to be known as Swami Ranganathananda.

Teachers of Vedanta who brush away all names and forms while describing reality are, paradoxically, fond of using mundane illustrations to drive their point home. Two common but powerful motifs are the sun and



Swami Ranganathananda with Dr S Radhakrishnan, 2nd President of India and a great Philosopher

the lion: the sun of Knowledge and the lion of Vedanta. Swami Ranganathanandaji possessed a luminous mind shedding the lustre of Vedantic knowledge and the heart of a lion—fearless, noble. He also embodied the Vedantic qualities of childlike simplicity, unstinting universal love and same-sightedness.

Maharaj was born on 15 December 1908 in Trikkur, a small village near Trissur in Kerala.

Swami Ranganathananda during the celebrations of the birth anniversary of Girish Chandra Ghosh in 1958





Swami Ranganathananda with Moulana Abdul Kalam at Indraprastha School, 1952

As a young boy he was always bubbling with energy. He later said: 'Love of adventure and dislike for easy life, and the German philosopher Nietzsche's dictum "live dangerously" have been with me ever since (childhood).' Even at a tender age his keen and perceptive mind reacted to the virus of untouchability, then ubiquitous in Malabar. He made it a point to break caste distinctions. When he was about fourteen, Sri Ramakrishna entered his life through *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and he was never the same again. Religion now became palpable. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, which he read subsequently, further revolutionized his mind and determined the future course of his life. The spiritual fire of his soaring young soul was stoked when he was initiated by his guru, who was then in a high spiritual state in Ootacamund. The initiation also testified to an earlier mystic dream the young boy had had about his guru. His young but mature soul naturally responded to the higher call of renunciation, service and God-realization, and in 1926 he joined the Ramakrishna Order in Mysore.

As a young boy he once uttered some bad words, picked up at school, in front of his

mother. She reprimanded him saying: 'My boy, your tongue is the abode of Vani, or Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and wisdom. Don't soil it by using foul language against others.' These words penetrated deep into him. His speeches in later years testified to the fact that Saraswati was truly seated on his tongue.

The first twelve years of Maharaj's monastic life, spent at the Mysore and Bangalore Ashramas, were days of hard work, study and meditation. He was involved in a host of Ashrama chores—from cooking and dishwashing to supervising the Ashrama hostel. He loved hard work. 'I have never known tiredness in my life,' he would say later. Amidst the busy routine, he also found time to memorize the *Gita* and the *Vivekachudamani*. He would recall this whenever someone complained about being



With Smt Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, at Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad

too burdened with work to make time for oneself.

Swami Ranganathanandaji's phenomenal mental acumen and memory were a revelation to many—even scientists. His sharp intellect and tempered devotion set him apart from the ordinary. He avidly and intensely studied not only Indian scriptures and mythology, but also those of other religions. In his intellectual journey, he traversed through the minutiae of Eastern and Western philosophies, the various branches of science, history, sociology, psychology and economics—in fact there was no field of knowledge that he did not touch. His intellectual appetite was so great that even ordinary subjects received his attention, not to speak of scientific discoveries and social trends, with which he kept himself abreast till the very end. The development of his brain was comple-



mented with his athleticism. He exercised regularly and was agile and vigorous. Even in his seventies, Maharaj could be seen playing volleyball, leaping and smashing the ball like a young man. His missionary activity reflected a wonderful blend of ancient wisdom and modern science. He had com-

menced addressing prisoners on ethical and spiritual life in Mysore Jail in 1933-34, and this he continued in Bangalore, among the youth, where he moved in 1935.

After Bangalore, Swami Ranganathanandaji was Secretary and Librarian at Ramakrishna Mission, Rangoon, Burma, from 1939 to 1942. When Rangoon had to be evacuated in the face of an impending Japanese invasion, he chose to return to India on foot along with thousands of other refugees, braving untold dangers but yet helping many on the way. During 1942-48 he headed the Mission's Karachi centre. His lectures there were very popular and were attended by all sections of society. Following the closure of the centre in the wake of the Partition, he was sent to head the Ramakrishna Mission in New Delhi between 1949 and 1962. This period turned out to be the most fruitful in

the centre's history. Apart from helping the victims of the Partition who were temporarily sheltered near Delhi, Maharaj built a temple, a students' library and an auditorium that used to be packed with the city's elite during his lectures. During 1962-67 he was in Calcutta as Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission

Institute of Culture and Director of its School of Humanistic and Cultural Studies. His lectures in the city became very well known among the intelligentsia. Then, for twenty years from 1973 to 1993, Maharaj was President of Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, where he founded an ashrama on land provided by the Andhra Pradesh government. There he undertook various rural development programmes and stirred the people of that city with his brilliant and profound discourses on Vedanta.

At the Government's urging Maharaj gave yearly talks to trainees at the National Academy of Administration, first at Delhi in 1956 and after that at Mussoorie, for many years. He also regularly addressed cadets at the National Defence College, Delhi. Generations of administrators and bright minds destined to lead the country heard his wonderful expositions on Indian values and how they could be implemented in administrative fields. He served as a member of the Indian National Commission for cooperation with UNESCO during 1964-67. Between 1956 and 1972 he went on several world tours as an ambassador of religion and Indian culture, travelling to over fifty countries in North and South America, Asia, Africa and Europe, including the then Communist states of USSR, Poland



and Czechoslovakia. During these government-sponsored tours, he lectured regularly, tirelessly and brilliantly. Universities, colleges, schools, cultural institutions, clubs and small groups of interested people all received something solid from him. From 1973 to 1986 Maharaj undertook annual tours to the US, Europe and Australia spreading the message of Vedanta and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Never confined within the

limits of race, language or nation, his consciousness was always international and universal. So his audiences, be they learned or ordinary, young or old, immediately connected with him. He loved—and dared—to discuss the challenging contemporary problems in the light of eternal values and Vedantic concepts and drew appreciation from one and all—from savants to servants. His national tours, which

took him to all kinds of institutions were as demanding as they were enlightening. He was proficient in several languages and was instrumental in starting many new Ramakrishna Math and Mission centres. He also helped and inspired other organizations and individuals to start ashramas where Swami Vivekananda's practical Vedanta could be practised.

Following the policy that Swami Vivekananda laid down for the Order, Swami

Ranganathanandaji always remained apolitical; yet statesmen and politicians of all creeds and affiliations, including rebels, came to him for sage advice. He worked for national integration at all levels, bringing politicians and administrators, industrialists and technocrats, educationists and students, scientists and professionals, doctors and lawyers, businessmen and workers, and even children to believe in their country, to stop exploitation of every kind, and to work for the amelioration of the poor and the downtrodden. Maharaj never kept any money with him; whatever money came to him was spent on charitable and social service schemes that helped humanity, either through the branch centres of the Ramakrishna Mission or other philanthropic organizations. For all his towering public stature, he was still an utterly simple, honest, humble and loving person. During the 1943 Bengal famine he collected and shipped 1,250 tons of rice from Karachi. He also raised over Rs 1.5 lakh for the Mission's relief work among the victims of civil strife in Bengal and Bihar, and cholera victims in Kerala.

Revered Maharaj saw that India was on the threshold of a great revival due to the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, and he energetically spread their message. He was a constant traveller and an unrelenting karma yogi of the highest order who never thought twice

about foregoing food and sleep to help people selflessly. In appreciation of his noble contribution as an integrator of humanity, he was honoured in 1985 with the first Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration.

Swami Ranganathanandaji was elected a trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a member of the governing body of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1961. On 1 April 1989 he was elected a Vice President, and on 7 September 1998 he became President of the Order. It was as Vice President that he commenced giving mantra diksha, spiritual initiation, and over 60,000 people were formally initiated by him into spiritual life over the next sixteen years. From 1998 onwards he lived at Belur Math.



All through his life, in addition to meeting his demanding schedule of travelling, lecturing, meeting people and attending to the details of administration, Maharaj found time to read and write extensively. He was a voracious reader and kept up the habit of serious study till the end of his life. All his talks and writings bear the stamp of deep thinking and scholarship. His intellectual outlook and austere habits concealed a very kind and large heart that was extremely sensitive to the sufferings of the poor and the downtrodden. He was deeply involved with the welfare of the weaker sections of society and women, and actively helped in their uplift. He was also greatly concerned about the need for consci-



Receiving the Gandhi Peace Prize from K R Narayanan, President of India, at Raj Bhavan, Kolkata in 1999



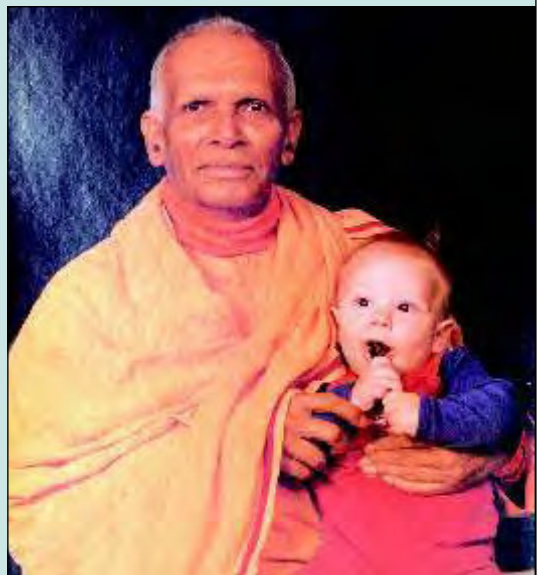
With Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Chief Minister, West Bengal

entious political leadership. Last year he sent out two booklets, *Vivekananda: His Call to the Nation* and his own *Enlightened Citizenship and Our Democracy*, to all members of the newly elected Indian Parliament and Legislative Assemblies.

A large number of Swami Ranganathanandaji's lectures have been published in book form, notable among which are: *The Message of the Upanishads*, *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita* (three volumes), *The Central Theme of Srimad Bhagavatam*, *The Message of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, *Eternal Values for a Changing Society* (four volumes), *A Pilgrim Looks at the World* (two volumes), *Vedanta and the Future of Mankind*, *Social Responsibilities of Public Administrators*, *Enlightened Citizenship and Our Democracy* and *Spiritual Life of the Householder*. His 600 audio tapes and 50 video tapes on various spiritual topics and cultural themes, including scriptural talks, discourses on Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta, and lectures on science and religion, are a great source of inspiration. His lectures and talks were in simple and beautiful language, and so are his books. He used to himself edit and proofread

his books—a habit he never gave up, despite his failing health.

On his demise, condolence messages were received from Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, President of India, Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, Smt Sonia Gandhi, President, All-India Congress Committee, Sri S M Krishna, Governor of Maharashtra, and Sri T N Chaturvedi, Governor of Karnataka. Sri Gopalkrishna Gandhi and Sri Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Governor and Chief Minister of West Bengal, also paid their homage.



Messages also poured in from many other Indian and foreign dignitaries, officials, organizations and individuals from different walks of life. Sri I K Gujral, former Prime Minister of India, and Sri L K Advani, former Deputy Prime Minister of India, wrote articles in eminent dailies about their association with Revered Maharaj and his great contribution to the social and spiritual welfare of humanity. On the 26th, the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha (the upper and lower houses of the Indian Parliament) paid homage to Revered Maharaj by standing in

silence for a short while as a mark of respect to his memory. The press, All-India Radio and Doordarshan gave extensive coverage. Newspapers in Bangladesh also published the news of his demise prominently.

The sun sets to rise again. The sun called Swami Ranganathananda has set only to rise in the hearts of thousands of disciples, devotees, friends, admirers and well-wishers who will work out the inspiration to fulfil the vision of all-round peace, prosperity and progress that Most Revered Maharaj instilled in them.

CONDOLENCE MESSAGE FROM HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA

I am saddened to learn about the passing away of Swami Ranganathanandaji, the Swamiji of indomitable spirit and a great spiritual leader.

Swami Ranganathanandaji was a noble soul who immersed himself into the mission of spreading the message of the Vedanta to humanity spread throughout this planet. I fondly remember my meeting with him during my visit to the Belur Math in October last year.

Kindly convey my condolences to all the members of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. I pray to the Almighty to give all of you the strength to bear the loss of this noble spiritual leader.

Dr A P J Abdul Kalam

EXCERPT FROM THE PRIME MINISTER'S CONDOLENCE MESSAGE

It is with deep sadness and a profound sense of loss that I join millions of our countrymen in expressing my sincere and heartfelt condolences at the passing away of one of the greatest teachers of our times, Swami Ranganathananda.

Swamiji was a teacher, a scholar, a sage, a companion of the needy, and above all a deeply religious person and a true humanist in the best traditions of our ancient culture and civilization. He was also a builder, having created and built new centres of learning and meditation for the Ramakrishna Mission at home and abroad. Generations of Indians have sat at his feet and imbibed the teachings of some of our greatest texts and epics. He was, without doubt, the most poetic and philosophical interpreter of the Gita in living memory.

Dr Manmohan Singh



उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 110

JUNE 2005

No. 6

Traditional Wisdom

MAHĀSAMĀDHI : ETERNAL UNION

त्र्यम्बकं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम् ।
उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनान्मृत्योर्मुक्षीय मामृतात् ॥

The three-eyed Lord we worship, sweet augments of prosperity. As a (ripe) cucumber from its stem, so may we be freed from the bonds of death; (may we) never be reft from immortality. (Rig Veda, 7.59.12)

वेदान्तविज्ञानसुनिश्चितार्थाः संन्यासयोगाद्यतयः शुद्धसत्त्वाः ।
ते ब्रह्मलोकेषु परान्तकाले परामृताः परिमुच्यन्ति सर्वे ॥

Having well ascertained the Self, the goal of the Vedantic knowledge, and having purified their minds through the yoga of sannyasa, the seers, never relaxing their efforts, enjoy (here) supreme Immortality and at the time of the great end attain complete freedom in Brahman. (*Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.2.6)

यथोदकं शुद्धे शुद्धमासिक्तं तादृगेव भवति ।
एवं मुनेर्विज्ञानत आत्मा भवति गौतम ॥

As pure water poured into pure water becomes one with it, so, O Gautama, does the Self of the contemplative sage who knows (Brahman). (*Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.15)

Few only know the truth. The rest will hate/ And laugh at thee, great one; but pay no heed./Go thou, the free, from place to place, and help/Them out of darkness, Maya's veil. Without/The fear of pain or search for pleasure, go/Beyond them both, Sannyasin bold! Say—/'Om Tat Sat, Om!' ('The Song of the Sannyasin')

It may be that I shall find it good to get outside of my body—to cast it off like a dis-used garment. But I shall not cease to work! I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God. (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 5.414)

☪ This Month ☪

A Profile of Greatness is an inspiring appraisal of the life and contributions of Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, thirteenth President of the Ramakrishna Order, by Swami Bhajanandaji, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

This month's editorial, **The Language of Religion**, introduces the other essays on religious and philosophical use of language that appear in this issue.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago presents an interesting appraisal of the Vedic religion vis-a-vis the Hebraic by Henry Thoreau, besides stressing the need for spreading the true principles of Hinduism in India and abroad.

Verses six to eleven of the twelfth chapter of the Gita, containing an enumeration of the different paths to the Divine, comprise the present instalment of Swami Atulanandaji's **Reflections on the Bhagavadgita**.

Pushpanjali to Sri Sarada Devi is an edited transcript of a touching homage to Sri Sarada Devi by Pravrajika Shraddhapranaji, President, Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna-Sarada Mission. The speech was delivered on 20 November 2004 on the occasion of Jagaddhatri Puja held to mark Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birth anniversary at Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi.

Swami Tattwamayanandaji, Editor, *Prabuddha Keralam*, concludes his engaging exposition of **The Concept of God in the Vedas** by illustrating how the seeds of bhakti and *prapatti* obtain in the Vedas and how the concept of God evolved from rich poly-

theism and henotheism to Advaitic monism in the Vedic texts.

Western Philosophic View of Religious Language is Dr Lekshmi Ramakrishnaiyer's representation of the views of John Hick, Paul Tillich and other scholars regarding the analogical, symbolic, non-cognitive, and normative nature of religious language. The author is Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram.

Indian Philosophic Prose in English: A New Historicist Perspective highlights the cultural embeddedness, the subversive as well as conformatory and participatory nature, and the veridical fluidity of Indian philosophic writings in English. The author, Dr Sumita Roy, is Associate Professor of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad.

The inspirational quality of Swami Vivekananda's prose is universally acknowledged. It often appears to be more a subject of experience than an object of analytical thought. **The Prose Style of Swami Vivekananda** by Prof. U S Rukhaiyar analyses the linguistic qualities of Swamiji's rhetoric that made his prose so effective. The author, lately deceased, was former Pro-Vice Chancellor, Jai Prakash University, Chapra.

Blake's Truth by Sri Asoke Basu, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at California State University, Hayward, is a succinct statement of how William Blake's direct apprehension of the mystical element in nature can fruitfully inform our own understanding of God.

This month's **Glimpses of Holy Lives** tells the story of an anonymous sadhu of Rishikesh, a life of lived contemplation.

A Profile of Greatness

SWAMI BHAJANANANDA

There are very many good people in this world, but there are only a few who can be regarded as truly great. Although very small in number, great men and women are found in all parts of the world. And, in spite of social and cultural differences, they share some common characteristics: they keep themselves above the trivialities of life and frailties of character; they feel kinship with the whole humanity; they are motivated by an irrepressible sense of mission in life. Swami Ranganathanandaji, the thirteenth President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, who passed away on 25 April 2005, manifested the above characteristics in abundant measure.

Marks of Greatness

Swami Ranganathanandaji always kept his mind at a higher plane of consciousness. He was a perpetually inspired person. It appeared as if his soul were aflame with the fire of the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, the light of the Upanishads, the power of the Gita and the air-currents of modern science. All those who came into contact with him found their minds ignited by the powerful ideas emanating from the deep recesses of his soul's convictions and certitudes.

He was a man without frontiers. He looked upon the whole humanity as one huge family and felt concerned about its welfare and progress. He had among his friends, admirers and disciples men and women of all castes, all religions, all regions, and all walks of life. And he was accessible to all. He was as friendly to the labourers of the ashrama garden as he was to political leaders like Pandit Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Sheikh Abdullah, Dr Sukarno and Aung San, and great scientists and philosophers like Julian Huxley, Dr

Radhakrishnan and others. Although he was the president of a worldwide monastic organization, he did not allow that to act as a strait-jacket. On the contrary, sannyasa liberated him from the shackles of ignorance, desires, hatred, and fear, and his liberated soul used monastic life as a sort of aerodrome to take off and fly freely in the boundless sky of global awareness, love and goodwill.

A small anecdote may illustrate the charisma that Ranganathanandaji radiated. In 1967 the Government of India sent him to Nagaland where the political situation was tense. His lecture had been arranged in the college hall of a town. The people there were predominantly Christian Naga and were assumed to be not friendly. Maharaj had been told not to expect more than ten or twelve people for the meeting. But when he reached the place, there were more than 2,000 people who filled the hall and the lawn outside. They listened spellbound to his talk, in the course of which he told them: 'You are our own, flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood. And India is based upon you, upon me, upon millions of common people like you. No one part is ruling over another part or group. India is a democratic republic; it strives to raise all its people to economic strength and social dignity.' After the talk the people, mostly young men and women, gathered around him. This was the first time they had seen an ochre-robed monk who treated them and their religion as his own and showed keen interest in their welfare.

A few years later he visited Nagaland again and addressed public gatherings. At one such meeting the Naga chairman of Dimapur township said: 'I am going to request the Chief Minister of Nagaland to invite you, Swami, to Nagaland again and again. We want you here, we want these ideas.'

A clear perception of the goal of life and a sense of mission entered his life at the age of fourteen when he read for the first time the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and the lectures of Swami Vivekananda. He then resolved to dedicate his whole life to the service of God and humanity by spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. This dedication to a noble cause remained the passion and mission of his life till the end.

Self-made Man

He was a self-made man. Since he joined the monastic order when he was hardly eighteen, his formal schooling did not go beyond the school-final. But he more than compensated for this drawback by persevering in disciplined, systematic studies. During his early years as a novice, he was given the duties of cooking, dishwashing and the like. He carried on his studies even at the workplace. As rice and vegetables boiled in the pots on the stove, he sat on a stool nearby and read his books. Among the books which he read in those early days of monastic life mention may be made of A J Thompson's *Introduction to Science*, H G Wells's *Outline of History*, Julian Huxley and H G Wells's *Science of Life*, MacDougall's *Introduction to Psychology*, Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* and Thilly's *History of Philosophy*. These books dealt with the fundamentals of their respective subjects in a systematic and comprehensive way. They gave him vast background knowledge to understand the tremendous contemporary relevance and importance of the great ideas contained in the Upanishads, the Gita, the works of Swami Vivekananda and the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, and interpret them in the modern idiom.

During those early years in Mysore he also gained a good grounding in Sanskrit and mastery over the English language. He had extraordinary power of memory and had not only memorized the whole of the Gita but could also quote passage after passage from

the Upanishads, the Bhagavata and the commentaries of Shankaracharya, and whole paragraphs from the speeches and writings of Swami Vivekananda. The main focus of all his studies and thinking was the works of Swami Vivekananda. It is doubtful whether anybody else in the world ever studied Vivekananda's works as thoroughly, especially from the standpoint of practical application of Swamiji's ideas, as Ranganathanandaji did.

The ideas and ideals of Swami Vivekananda permeated the whole personality of Ranganathanandaji and shaped his whole outlook on life, his thoughts and actions. As already stated, Ranganathanandaji regarded spreading Swami Vivekananda's ideas all over the world as his chief mission in life. He carried out this task not only through lectures and talks but also through his life. His was an authentic life. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, '*Apni achari dharma jivere shekhay*; Teach others by practising yourself.' Ranganathanandaji practised what he taught.

Respect for All

We mention here three key concepts in Vivekananda's message and how they found expression in Ranganathanandaji's life. The most central concept in Swami Vivekananda's message is the potential divinity of the soul. In the words of Swamiji, 'Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within.' This noble concept holds the possibility of immense practical application in diverse fields of human life. It gives to every individual an inherent, inalienable dignity irrespective of his social or economic status. This concept was the main guiding principle for Ranganathanandaji in his interactions with people belonging to all walks of life.

He treated everyone with respect. Everyone, from a sweeper to a top government official, was equal in his eyes. When he was the head of the Ramakrishna Mission's centre in Delhi, during lunch hour he would go to the dining hall after the first batch of monks and

guests had finished their meal and would join the second batch so that he could have his meal sitting with the cook and the labourers. All the servants and labourers (who were referred to as 'helpers') were provided well-furnished quarters (each room having a fan). He never ignored anyone who went to him. When somebody made pranam to him by touching his feet—the customary way of showing respect to a sannyasin—even if he was busy or talking with distinguished guests, he would turn to the person, be he a junior novice or a poor man, and respond with folded palms or at least with a nod of his head. When senior monks made pranams to him, he would shake hands with them, which was his way of telling them, 'We are equal.'

The vice chancellor of a university in Uttar Pradesh once invited him for a parlour talk. The drawing room was full of professors, other faculty members, and their families. The vice chancellor's cook, an uneducated village brahmin, also sat crouching humbly in a corner. Ranganathanandaji spoke to the audience in English. But every now and then he would stop and tell the cook in Hindi the gist of what he had spoken in English. Needless to say, everybody was charmed by this kind gesture.

Positive Outlook

Swami Vivekananda advocated, as a corollary to his doctrine of potential divinity of the soul, the cultivation of a positive outlook on life based on faith in oneself, strength, and fearlessness. Ranganathanandaji embodied this doctrine in the fullest measure. Somewhere deep within him he had tapped the perennial springs of spiritual power. This was the secret of the tremendous self-confidence, inner strength, fearlessness and positive outlook on life that characterized Ranganathanandaji's personality. These were the inner qualities which enabled him to face countless problems and crises in life and take up heavy responsibilities at a young age. He took charge of the Ramakrishna Mission centre in Ran-

goon at the age of thirty-one.

From 1958 to 1972 he toured more than fifty countries in the West and again from 1972 to 1986 he lectured in USA, Australia and other countries spreading the message of Vedanta as expounded by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, awakening the minds of men and women wherever he went. In America alone he delivered more than three hundred lectures. All this incessant travelling and lecturing and meeting people never seemed to tire him. Nobody ever saw him yawning, nobody ever saw him depressed or moving in a lackadaisical manner. He was always found to be alert, attentive and cheerful.

As he had faith in himself, so he had faith in others too. He saw immense possibilities in everyone, and encouraged people to develop their latent capacities. He freely expressed his admiration when he saw anybody doing anything good. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than hearing something good about others. He never liked negative attitudes which often find expression in speaking ill of others.

He maintained a positive attitude not only towards people but also towards other objects. He used to receive a large number of books, journals and magazines. Since it was not possible for him to read all of them, he would pass some of them to me. The next day he would ask me about my views on the book or journal. Some of those books and journals were really worthless and, on earlier occasions, I used to frankly tell him so. He would then remain silent, and I could see he was not quite happy with my review. I learned my lesson. Later, when he gave me such books or journals, I would try to find at least one or two good points in them and, when he asked me about my opinion, I would say, 'It contains one or two good points, but ...' He would not allow me to complete my statement. 'It contains one or two good points, that's good, that's good,' he would say and close the discussion! This of course does not imply he lacked critical judgment. He just wanted to see

good in the things people had sent him out of love or respect.

Lifelong Seva

Swami Vivekananda gave a two-fold motto to Ramakrishna Mission (it could as well be the motto for all Indians and for all humanity): '*Atmano mokshartham jagad-hitaya cha*; For one's own liberation and for the welfare of the world.' For the fulfilment of the second part of the motto, welfare of the world, Swamiji taught karma yoga. This karma yoga is based on two principles. One of these is, 'Work is worship'. This implies that all activities are to be carried out as an offering to the supreme Spirit. The second principle is, '*Shiva jnane jiva seva*; Service to man is service to God.'

Ranganathanandaji was one of the best exemplars of these two principles of karma yoga. He was one of the great karma yogis of the modern age. From the age of eighteen when he joined the Order till the age of ninety-six when he passed away, he worked incessantly for the welfare of the world. Even at the age of ninety-six, when he had several ailments, he continued to work—presiding over official meetings, giving spiritual guidance to seekers, consoling and comforting hundreds of people who thronged to him, and so on.

Although his immediate field of work was that of middle-class people, he showed deep concern for the poor and the downtrodden and took active interest in all service activities for the poor. He was particularly interested in the work of the Ramakrishna Mission among the tribals in Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh and other places. A few years ago an organization working for the utterly backward tribals in north Kerala sought financial help from Ranganathanandaji. Since the organization did not belong to the Ramakrishna Mission, objections were raised to extending help to it. But Ranganathanandaji overrode the objections and sent a substantial donation to the organization.

He was also deeply concerned about the

welfare of women. Hundreds of women and several women's organizations received help from him. In 1959 the authorities of Belur Math started a separate monastic order for women known as Sri Sarada Math, which subsequently became a totally independent organization. Till the end of his life Ranganathanandaji provided solid support to this organization and to its social service wing known as Ramakrishna-Sarada Mission.

A True Sannyasin

Two more characteristics of his personality need to be mentioned in this context. One is that, although he travelled all over the world many times and mingled with all ranks of people, he remained forever a true sannyasin, scrupulously following the two basic vows of a monk, namely, chastity and poverty. Whatever money he received, he distributed freely without delay. While travelling, even in foreign countries, he seldom carried money, depending solely on the charity of his friends. In his personal life he allowed nothing but the necessities and barest minimum comforts. In fact, his spirit of renunciation made him lead such a simple life that it is difficult for most people to imitate it. Swami Vivekananda once told Sister Nivedita that it is the power of a person's character, and not his oratorical skill, that creates an impact on the listeners' minds. This was very true of Ranganathanandaji.

Behind his austere lifestyle, intellectual outlook and work efficiency lay hidden a very loving and kind heart. He made deep personal relationships which inspired lifelong loyalties. His love was devoid of emotional effervescence. It was a steady and firm spiritual bonding which remained unbroken by time and space.

His Contributions

Ranganathanandaji made significant contributions to human welfare and progress in the contemporary world. Perhaps the best known of his contributions is his role as the

‘cultural ambassador’ of India in foreign countries. At a time when India was regarded as a land of snake charmers, beggars, cow worship and diseases, Ranganathanandaji’s eloquent exposition of the glories of Indian culture and spirituality helped create a better image of this nation among the intellectuals in Western countries. Paradoxically, many Indian nationals themselves residing in those countries, who were ignorant of India’s cultural heritage and were harbouring an inferiority complex with regard to their motherland, had their eyes opened when they listened to Ranganathanandaji’s talks. Even in India many intellectuals, government officials, especially those who belong to the Administrative Service, professors and students owe their understanding of Indian culture to Ranganathanandaji’s lectures and books.

His equally important contribution was the exposition and popularization of the great ideas of Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda himself was the first person to bring out the life-giving eternal truths of Vedanta from obscure scriptures and interpret them in the modern idiom and show their practical application in solving the problems of life. The enlightening concepts of Vivekananda’s message had to be popularized, revitalized, reinterpreted in terms of the rapidly changing ideas of modern science and socio-economic life. To this task Ranganathanandaji devoted the best part of his inner resources.

Swami Vivekananda was the first great thinker in India to attempt to harmonize science and religion or, more correctly, science and Vedanta. Swamiji showed that, although science and religion belong to two different planes of human consciousness, they are not contradictory to each other but have several common features and are complementary to each other. By the middle of the twentieth century, with the discoveries in relativity, quantum mechanics, nuclear physics, electronics, and other fields, science had advanced to a mind-boggling extent. There was a great need

to place the universal concepts of Vedanta interpreted by Swami Vivekananda in the perspective of the new developments in science. Ranganathanandaji addressed himself to this task, and this was an original and trend-setting contribution of his to modern thought.

For nearly half a century Ranganathanandaji provided a strong moral force countering the growing forces of materialism, immorality and corruption in Indian society. His earnest voice echoing in different parts of this country reminded the leaders of society, bureaucrats, businessmen and educated people in general, about their duties to the poor and to women. He spoke against untouchability and oppression of lower castes still being practised in some of the states. He spoke against all kinds of exploitation.

He served as a role model for a new enlightened way of life. His life showed that monasticism is not a limiting adjunct but a liberating influence. His life showed how one can harmonize spiritual enlightenment and success in life, how one can attain the highest fulfilment by dedicating oneself to the service of humanity. His life provided a visible demonstration of the validity of the principles of practical Vedanta that Swami Vivekananda propounded a hundred years ago.

Ranganathanandaji remained the symbol of the cultural unity of India and a living centre of unity for the people of India for nearly half a century. People belonging to all parts of India, all religious groups, all strata of society, even political groups, could relate to him. The disappearance of this centre and symbol of unity, caused by the death of Ranganathanandaji, has created a big void in the collective consciousness of the nation.

The lines of Stephen Spender on great men aptly sum up this profile of Ranganathanandaji also:

Born of the sun, they travelled a short while
towards the sun,
And left the vivid air signed with their
honour.

The Language of Religion

EDITORIAL

को अद्वा वेद क इह प्रवोचत् कुत आजाता कुत इयं विसृष्टिः ।

अर्वाग्देवा अस्य विसर्जनेन अथा को वेद यत आबभूव ॥

Who really knows? Who in this world may speak of it? Whence this creation, how was it engendered? The gods (were) subsequent to the (world's) creation; so who knows whence it arose¹

The Power of Language

The search for a unified theory of physical forces has lead contemporary physicists to explore high-energy states, for it has been found that under extremely high energy conditions that are presently obtainable only in specialized particle accelerators, these forces tend to lose their distinctive identity. It is therefore conceivable that under the extreme conditions that prevailed when the universe came into existence (conditions that one cannot, at present, even think of replicating experimentally), the forces that we now talk of as distinct entities—gravitation, electromagnetism, and the two nuclear forces—were all seething indistinguishably in a ferment of intense energy. As the baby universe expanded and cooled, these forces distilled out as distinct entities as did the material particles associated with them.

These speculations about the early life of the universe, though backed by empirical data, do raise some interesting philosophical questions. What does this 'distillation of forces' mean? Can we say that the law of gravity appeared at a point in time? What 'meta-law' governs this process? Is it prior to time?

We will not be exploring the answers to these questions here but raise them only to highlight the process of conceptualization, for though physics is associated with concrete objects in the popular mind, theoretical physics is largely about concepts (as is all the mathematics that underpins it), albeit concepts that can be shown to work in the material world.

Now, concepts are inextricably linked with language and it is in and through language that the power of concepts is manifest. What distinguishes the speculations of modern physicists from those of their forefathers of ancient times is the former's ability to formulate their conceptions in precise mathematical expressions—the language of theoretical physics—and then generate specific and verifiable predictions from these formulations. The power of mathematics, in turn, lies in the fact that it works; even purely abstract mathematical concepts are found to be effective in describing and predicting subtle and complex physical phenomena.

But why should mathematics be any more efficacious than ordinary language (and thought) in apprehending the universe? If the physical universe is somehow mathematically underpinned, there is no reason why other forms of language should not prove equally potent in sizing it up. Religious language, for one, certainly lays claim to this potential.

Vāk: the Primordial Speech

The Vedic rishis traced the source of language to Vāk, the quintessential speech. From the causal state devoid of all cognitions (*apra-ketaṁ salīlam*) the primal volition manifested (*kāmadatadagre samavartata*) as *rta*, the cosmic law, that gave rise to Vāk—'*Vāgākṣaraṁ prathamajā rtasya vedānām mātā amṛtasya nābhī*'; Vāk is imperishable, the first-born of *rta*, mother of the Vedas, the source of immortality.² Vāk is thus identified with the manifest Brahman and mediates all knowledge—'*Vāchaiva samrād prajñāyante, vāg vai samrād paramam brahma*'.³

Vāk is not to be equated with empirical speech or language (*vaikhari vāk*), for Vāk is quadripartite: three of these parts lie unmanifested within the depth of one's being; it is

only the fourth that is spoken forth—'*Guhā trīṇi nihitā neṅgayanti turīyaṁ vāco manuṣyā vādanti*.'⁴ So the primal Vāk is also termed Parā Vāk or Śabda Brahman, at which state of evolution the distinction between substantive material objects (*artha*), their denominations (*nāma* as word, or *śabda*), and the mental concepts and cognitions relating to these (*pratyaya*) are all indistinguishably intertwined in the primordial soup, the *apraketa salila*. This Parā Vāk evolves through the stages of *paśyanti* and *madhyamā* before manifesting as audible sound (*dhvani*) and the phonemes (*varṇas*) that go to build language. *Paśyanti* is unformed (*nirākāra*) language, where forms of objects and the sequences of words have still not crystallized; yet this is the very language and insight of the heart (*dhī*) that the rishis visualize as mantras. *Madhyamā* corresponds to our mental language that is linked to our thoughts, of which we become aware while ruminating in quiet and which is resorted to actively during mental japa of one's mantra.⁵

In this cosmocentric view of language and its referents, *śabda*, *artha* and *pratyaya* are all derived from one common source that is linguistically designated Parā Vāk. It is this link that accounts for the veridical efficacy of our thoughts and language. The Vaiyakaranas (Indian grammarians), Mimamsakas, and Vedantins take this link to suggest that the relation between *śabda* and its meaning (*artha*) is eternal, underived, and impersonal. They argue that this relation cannot be based on convention (as is asserted by the Buddhist, Jaina and Charvaka thinkers, and also by modern linguists) for the notion of 'convention' presupposes language—the very thing claimed to be derived from convention. Language is therefore taken to be beginningless and ever-existent (*nitya*).⁶

Meaning and Function of Religious Language

If words are ontologically linked to their referents, are all forms of vocalization mean-

ingful? The pragmatic answer, on which all Indian philosophical schools agree, is no, not at the *vyāvahārika* level of conventional usage. The practical test of meaning is the ability of language to produce valid knowledge (*pramā*). The smallest unit of language conveying unitary meaning (*ekārtha*) is a sentence (*vākya*). The words comprising a sentence must have logical interdependence (*ākāṅkṣā*), contiguity (*āsatī*), and consistency of meaning (*yogyatā*). These, along with the capacity of the sentence as a whole to give rise to a cognition in the listener (*tātparya*), are the determining factors of semantic validity. If any of these is missing, then the sentence is unlikely to be comprehensible. Moreover, for a verbal testimony to be valid, it must not be contradicted by other means of knowledge like perception and inference.⁷

Religious language, however, differs from the language of ordinary use in dealing with transcendental subjects and issues of ultimate concern (the *pāramārthika* level). Even when put to pragmatic use, as for instance in the mantras one utters during puja offerings, the meanings and connotations derived by the user may be very different from what is revealed by the syntax or what is obtained by ordinary grammatical analysis. Most mantras are, in fact, meaningful only to the initiate. This problem of meaning and function of religious language, especially in the context of Vedic mantras, has been discussed by Yaska-charya in his *Nirukta*, an etymological commentary on the Vedic lexicon, *Nighaṇṭu*.⁸

The issue is argued persuasively by Kautsa, who puts forward the *prima facie* view that Vedic mantras are meaningless for the following reasons: 1) Vedic texts are considered syntactically fixed and unalterable, but in ordinary language a single idea may be expressed in a variety of ways. 2) The use of Vedic mantras in yajnas is directed by the Brahmana texts. If the mantras were intrinsically meaningful, they would not be dependent on other texts. 3) The Brahmanas contain passages like '*Agnaye samidhyamānāya hotar-*

anubrūhiti; To the *agni* that has been lighted should the *hotā* (sacrificial priest) address thus.' The use of such mantras by the *adhvaryu* (the officiating priest) is meaningless, for the *hotā* himself, being versed in the Vedas, knows what needs to be done. 4) Then there are mantras that contradict each other. For instance, one mantra says: '*Eka eva rudro avastathe na dvitīyaḥ*'; Rudra is one alone, there being no other', plainly in contradiction to another: '*Asaṅkhyāta sahasrāṇi ye rudrā adhibhūmyām*'; Innumerable thousands are the Rudras that are over the earth.' Or again, in one mantra Indra is described as '*āsatruḥ*, without enemies', while another says: '*Śataṁ senā ajayatsākamindrah*'; Indra defeated a hundred standing armies.' Such speech is not unlike that of the mad. 5) Some mantras are self-contradictory: '*Aditirdyaur aditirantarīkṣam aditirmātā sa pitā sa putraḥ*'; Aditi is heaven, Aditi is the firmament, Aditi is the mother, the father, the son.' One individual cannot possibly be all these simultaneously. 6) The meaning of many mantras is patently inconsistent with facts. For instance, in the *pāśu-yāga* (Vedic animal sacrifice) a mantra is addressed to the sacrificial sword: '*Svadhite mainam himsiḥ*'; O Sword, do not hurt this (sacrificial animal).' The animal is then sacrificed using the same sword! 7) Finally, there are Vedic words like *amyag*, *yādṛśmīn*, *jārayāyi*, and *kāṇukā* that make no etymological sense.

Yaskacharya opens his refutation of these charges with the assertion that Vedic words are no different from those used for secular purposes. Hence, if the latter are meaningful, so are the former. If there are rules for preservation of the integrity of Vedic texts (the prohibition against syntactical alteration being one such rule), secular language too is framed within a set of grammatical rules for it to be comprehensible. The very fact that the Brahmana texts endorse the use of these mantras during rituals, argues Yaskacharya, is evidence of their validity. The ritual function of the mantras must needs be evident for

them to be so prescribed. In fact the Brahmana texts only help in choosing from a whole range of mantras the ones they recommend for a particular ritual.

As an example of the intrinsic meaningfulness of mantras, the *Nirukta* cites a marriage mantra: '*Thaiva staṁ mā viyauṣṭaṁ viśvamāyur-vaśnutām, kṛṣṇantau putrair naptṛbhir modamānau sve grhe*'; May both of you, remaining unseparated in your own house, attain fullness of age, rejoicing with children and grandchildren.'

The benedictive function that this mantra subserves is one of the commonest uses that religious language is ordinarily put to. Benediction is, of course, an indispensable component of most religious ceremonies and sacraments. Another related function of religious language is evocation. The Vedic hymns comprising *śāstra* and *stoma*, *stuti* and *stotra* and the category of Vedic texts termed *arthavāda* (eulogy)—all serve to invoke and praise the Divine and to evoke feelings of the sacred.

The directions of the *adhvaryu* to the *hotā* are an example of the normative use of religious language. Yaskacharya draws a parallel to the common norm of greeting one's elders by announcing one's name and *gotra* (lineage or surname) even when these are known to the former. Such injunctions form the basis of personal and social discipline although they may at times be misused as tools for extracting privilege and exercising control.

The mantra pertaining to Aditi is an example of the multiple levels of meaning inherent in language use. When the constitutive clauses are so plainly contradictory that a denotative meaning (*śakyārtha*) is impossible, secondary meanings have to be derived by implication (*lakṣaṇā*). Metaphorical language (*upacāra*) is, in fact, a very potent tool for religious expression since the transcendental elements of religion are beyond our ordinary cognitive experiences, and hence not very amenable to direct denotation. The metaphor subsumes both symbolic expression and anal-

ogy. The injunctions for upasana and worship are, of necessity, framed in symbolic language like '*ādityo brahma ityādeśah*; the sun is Brahman—this is the instruction', or '*śālagrāma girir viṣṇu*; the *śālagrāma* stone is Viṣṇu.' The stories of Sri Ramakrishna and biblical parables have a powerful effect on the mind because of their illuminative analogies. Sri Ramakrishna's analogy of water and ice, for instance, was enough to silence the then hot debate about whether or not God had form.

The paradox is a singularly powerful metaphor for expressing the inexpressible. Brahman is beyond all conceptual and verbal categories. Expressions like '*Āsino dūram vrajati śayāno yāti sarvataḥ*; Though sitting still, It travels far; though lying down, It goes everywhere' are meditative tools for breaking our conceptual barriers and directly apprehending the ineffable Reality that is our own Being. The koans used by Zen masters also fall in this category and serve a similar purpose. Hakuin's 'Let me hear the sound of one hand clapping' or Yeno's 'Show me your original face before you were born' are instances of such impossible commands whose resolution can occur in enlightenment alone. A series of negations is another comparable contrivance. The *Mandukya Upanishad*'s description of the fourth state of consciousness (*turiya*) is an apt example: '*Nāntaḥ prajñāṁ na bahisprajñāṁ nobhayataḥ prajñāṁ na prajñānaghaṇaṁ na prajñāṁ nāprajñāṁ*; (*Turiya* is) not that which is conscious of the inner world, nor that which is conscious of the external world, nor that which is conscious of both, nor that which is a mass of consciousness. It is not simple consciousness, nor is It unconsciousness.'

Then there is the category of technical terms that calls for specialized knowledge. The meaning of terms like *amyag* that Kautsa cites as obscure can be obtained only from specialized texts like the *Nirukta*. The apparent ambiguity about the number of Rudras can be resolved, says Yaskacharya, if we know about the special capacity of the devas to transform

themselves into multiple forms. The allusions to Indra waging wars also cannot be taken literally if we know that, having identified themselves with the source of all power, the devas can have no enemies. The allegory of the conflict, then, is a simile for the interaction between water and sunlight that results in rain.

Finally, the mantra for the sacrificial sword has a sacramental role. Ahimsa, or non-injury, is an unequivocally spiritual imperative. Thus yajnas like the *paśu-yāga* that call for animal sacrifice in order to obtain some 'less than ultimate' gains need to be appropriately sacralized if the sacrificer is not to suffer from guilt. It is for this reason that Hindu scriptures allow the killing of animals only for religious purposes.⁹ That the process of sacralization acts as a strong deterrent to morally questionable behaviour is well highlighted by Sri Ramakrishna's advice to his disciple Surendranath Mitra to offer to the Divine Mother the wine that he consumed regularly. This simple act was enough to gradually lead Surendra to total abstinence.

Religious Language and Cognition

The profound psychological effects of religious language are evidence of its inherent power. The fact that it is often non-rational does not detract from this inherent potency, for much of our routine behaviour—determined by our instincts, emotions, and intuitions—is non-rational. These aspects of our personality cannot be reduced to discrete logical categories.

In her article on the 'Western Philosophical View of Religious Language' Dr Lekshmi Ramakrishnaiyer, following John Hick and some other recent theorists, suggests that religious language is non-cognitive; it serves to express emotions and feelings or project ethical views and behavioural orientations, but does not lead to any verifiable knowledge. The Vedantic theory of knowledge controverts this view by accepting verbal testimony as a valid means of knowledge. It agrees with Hick

that for cognition to be valid it must not be contradicted by any other means of knowledge. It therefore makes bold to apply the same criterion to religious language too. In fact, we are perpetually testing, often unconsciously, all linguistic inputs that enter our minds throughout the day against the testimony of our senses and of our reason based on past experience. We suspend judgement on the many things that we cannot immediately verify, but we often need to act on uncertain factual claims, if only to prove them false.

Our emotions are not perceived as mental constructs (*antaḥkaraṇa vṛttis*), but Vedānta reminds us that they still are objects of immediate perception (*sākṣi pratyakṣa*). If language did not possess the ability to evoke replicable perceptions poetry, for one, would lose its universal appeal. When Blake talks about 'seeing the world in a grain of sand' he is trying to convey what is, in essence, an ineffable perception. Rabindranath Tagore writes:

I remember, when I was a child, that a row of cocoanut trees by our garden wall, with their branches beckoning the rising sun on the horizon, gave me a companionship as living as I was myself. I know it was my imagination which transmuted the world around me into my own world—the imagination which seeks unity, which deals with it. But we have to consider that this companionship was true; that the universe in which I was born had in it an element profoundly akin to my own imaginative mind, one which wakens in all children's natures the Creator, whose pleasure is in interweaving the web of creation with His own pattern of many-coloured strands.¹⁰

Spiritual language explores territories deeper than that of poetic emotions. It deals with insight (and this includes the insight of the poets) and intuition—levels that correspond to *paśyanti* Vāk—that are only poorly expressible through the medium of verbal *vaikhari*, and which need to be explored in the subjective depths of one's being.

Granting cognitive status to religious

language must not, however, be equated with validity. If religious language points to supersensual verities, we need great mental discipline to correctly apprehend this meaning. The subjective nature of these meanings also calls for uncompromising intellectual honesty if we are not to deceive ourselves into erroneous interpretations. The lack of spiritual discipline and honest intellectual rigour is a major cause of theological conflicts. These are the major tools for revealing the import of the language of religion just as mathematical rigour is indispensable for theoretical physics to make valid predictions about physical phenomena. Without them religion turns into meaningless dogma that is then made 'meaningful' through inane conflict. Chiselled with these, religious language opens up our insight into the profound and uncluttered simplicity of our being, a simplicity so eloquently expressed in Bashō's haiku:

When I look carefully,
I see the *nazima* blooming.
By the hedge!

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Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

June 1905

A comparison between Judaism and Hinduism by the American thinker Thoreau, lately published in the *Atlantic Monthly* (Feb. 05), will not be out of place ...

‘The Hindus are more serenely and thoughtfully religious than the Hebrews. They have a purer, more independent and impersonal knowledge of God. Their religious books describe the first inquisitive and contemplative access to God; the Hebrew Bible a conscientious return, a grosser and more personal repentance. Repentance is not a free and fair highway to God. A wise man will dispense with repentance. It is shocking and passionate. God prefers that you approach Him thoughtful, not penitent, though you are the chief of sinners. It is only by forgetting yourself that you draw near to Him.

‘The calmness and gentleness with which the Hindu philosophers approach and discourse on forbidden themes is admirable.

‘What extracts from the Vedas I have read fall on me like the light of a higher and purer luminary, which describes a loftier course through a purer stratum—free from particulars, simple, universal. It rises on me like the full moon after the stars have come out, wading through some far summer stratum of the sky.

‘The Vedanta teaches how, “by forsaking religious rites”, the votary may “obtain purification of mind”.

‘One wise sentence is worth the State of Massachusetts many times over.

‘The Vedas contain a sensible account of God.

‘The religion and philosophy of the Hebrews are those of a wilder and ruder tribe, wanting the civility and intellectual refinement and subtlety of the Hindus.

‘I do not prefer one religion or philosophy to another. I have no sympathy with the bigotry and ignorance which make transient and partial and puerile distinctions between one man’s faith or form of faith and another—as Christian and heathen. I pray to be delivered from narrowness, partiality, exaggeration, bigotry.’

But a light is not hidden under a bushel. A great good thought should not be shrouded in a dead language and buried within the covers of an obsolete book. A power, peerless in history for the spiritual growth of humanity, developed and perfected through ages by the best souls of each generation of a race of gifted men, does not deserve to be abused and wasted by their own descendants. Yet, are not we Hindus, the heirs of the Veda and Vedanta, Darshanas and Smritis, Itihasas and Puranas, fossilizing the true religion of Spirit contained in them by neglecting its spread and erecting all kinds of foolish barriers around it? ...

To live and not merely to vegetate, we must be able to give. No vigorous and healthy life is possible without giving. The highest gift in the world, spiritual knowledge, is in India’s keeping. Her sons and daughters have still the capacity of raising themselves to the height whence they can shower this blessing upon all.

Those who agree with us so far will no doubt realize that the work before us is twofold: (1) imparting the religion of principles, the true Hinduism, to the masses of India and (2) spreading the same in other countries. It rests with India’s sons and daughters, the spiritual and patriotic ones, who understand the situation, to lead the way.

—from ‘Occasional Notes’

Reflections on the Bhagavadgita

SWAMI ATULANANDA

Chapter 12 (*continued*)

6. But those who, surrendering all actions to Me and regarding Me as the supreme Goal, worship Me, meditating on Me with single-hearted devotion—

7. For them, whose hearts are thus fixed on Me, O son of Pritha, I become, ere long, the saviour from the ocean of mortal samsara.

Those bhaktas who worship Me, Ishvara, the Lord of the universe, in my Universal Form, I, the Lord, will lift up from the ocean of samsara, the ocean of birth and death, this world-life, so hard to cross. But they must be devoted to Me alone and not to worldly pursuits. At the same time they must perform the duties that I have placed before them, re-

nouncing all selfish interest and offering all their actions to Me, as service to Me. Thus longing for Me alone and not for what I can give, and contemplating Me exclusively, they will take refuge in Me as their saviour, and I shall raise them, before long, from this miserable life, into the bliss of eternal Life. And because it is so, says Sri Krishna:

8. Fix your heart on Me alone and rest your understanding in Me; thus shall you doubtlessly live in Me hereafter.

The bhaktas feel that they have nothing to do for themselves, but certain charges are laid upon them by the Lord, which they must fulfil. Work can have dangerous effects. But there is a way in which work can be done without the evil effect of causing more bondage. And that is by renouncing the fruit of our labour, by consecrating our work to God. Therefore Sri Krishna said: 'Surrender all actions to Me.' And in this verse, Sri Krishna gives another very important instruction: 'Fix your heart on Me alone and rest your understanding in Me; then surely shall you live in Me hereafter.' Manas and buddhi, that is, mind and understanding, must reach out to God. All our thoughts, our purposes, our determination and reasoning should have the Deity for the goal. That is called 'resting in the Lord'. Our thoughts reach out to God; we try to remember Him, to think of Him always. And our purpose is to serve, to please Him, to

obey Him. And our determination is based on the highest Truth. From that standpoint we decide our actions, we determine, we reason. Truth is always our goal. And that Truth is the Spirit. And then, with our life thus regulated, we rest in Him. Then, Sri Krishna assures us, we will abide in Him hereafter. Not only hereafter, but now and always do we then abide in Him. Here and hereafter are two conditions very different for us who identify ourselves so much with the present life. They mean with and without body; and we can only imagine a life in the body. But the true bhakta does not see such a great distinction between the two states, for already his life is centred in the Spirit. Already his body-existence means very little to him. When his body drops away it simply frees him from a little burden, he feels freer still. He lives in God now. There go all his thoughts, his interests, his aspirations. And so, hereafter it will be the same, but in a still fuller

sense. The physical world will then no longer stand in his way. He will be absorbed in God.

But such a life of the highest aspiration is

very difficult. There are very few who can fix their hearts steadily on God. Therefore Sri Krishna says in the next verse:

9. If you are unable to fix your mind steadfastly on Me, then, by faithful practice of devotion, do seek to reach Me, O Dhananjaya.

Because the truly religious life is so difficult, the blessed Lord, in His great mercy, proceeds to smooth the path for every earnest aspirant, however low his spiritual condition may be. And so Sri Krishna says: If what I told you is too difficult, if you

Drink of the living waters and you will never thirst again. Taste of the spiritual joy and worldly joy will no more attract you. All eternity is before you. You need not be discouraged if you do not succeed at once. Try again and again and at last you will succeed.

We have seen previously how ... we can make the different objects that we come in contact with remind us of God, how special hours of the day may be set aside for such practice and how, in short, thousands of ways will open up to him who strives sincerely.

So first Sri Krishna says: Keep your mind constantly on Me alone. That is the highest life. But if that is too hard to practice, then try to remember Me as often as you can. This must be a constant and faithful attempt. And we have seen previously how, by diverse methods, we can be assisted in such

cannot succeed in remembering Me always, never mind; do not get discouraged. I will tell you what to do. I have told you of *abhyasa yoga* (in Chapter Eight). Practise that, a little at a time. Whenever your mind runs away from Me to other objects, try to bring it back. When your heart runs in search of pleasure, remember that, of all joys, to know Me is the highest joy. I am the essence of all bliss. The greatest worldly pleasure is but an atom of that supreme Bliss, which is God. Therefore try for that highest Bliss. Go to the fountainhead.

practice—how it can be made easier by taking help of the external world, how we can make the different objects that we come in contact with remind us of God, how special hours of the day may be set aside for such practice and how, in short, thousands of ways will open up to him who strives sincerely. God helps us if we help ourselves. That is, if we make strong and repeated attempts, then the light of Truth, which is God, flashes into and illumines our minds.

10. If you are unable to practise *abhyasa* too, be intent on doing actions for My sake. Even by doing actions for My sake, you shall attain perfection.

If both the methods mentioned (that is, the method of constant remembrance and that of repeated attempts to remember Me) are beyond your power, then devote yourself to works which please Me. For thus, working for My sake, you will become perfect, even without the practice of other forms of yoga or devotions. This is called the path of service or the

path of action, *karma yoga*. In Hindu scriptures we find mention made of special works performed to please the Lord. These include building of temples or places of worship, observance of fasts and feasts, singing hymns, performing charitable acts, and so on. Of course, such acts will purify the mind and the purified mind will be able to practise yoga.

Through the constant practice of yoga the mind will become enlightened, and this will lead to perfection and freedom.

But for some, this also will be too troublesome or unattractive. Well, says Sri Krishna, you need not perform any special acts, for I look upon all work as the same. I do not care for the type of work. I am pleased with all work if the attitude in which the work is per-

formed is right. The question with God is not what we are doing, but how we are doing it. It is not the work that is of much importance, but the motive. So, if you do not wish to engage in special works that are pleasing to Me, in such works as are of benefit to My children, then I will show you still another way. And so we read in verse eleven:

11. If you are unable to do even this, then taking refuge in Me alone and being self-controlled, do surrender (unto Me) the fruit of all action.

Here, Sri Krishna teaches abandonment of the fruits of actions. 'To work you have the right, but not to the fruits thereof.' I know, it is by no means easy to give up doing things from a personal motive or desire; to act always for Me as My faithful servant; to ask every time, 'Will this please the Lord?' as has been taught in the previous verse. Therefore, if you cannot control your desire for certain actions or certain lines of work, then perform such work, but do not be anxious for the result. Remember that results come from Me. Let your attitude of mind be the same, no matter how the results turn out. Make Me responsible for that. My will comes to pass anyhow. You may call it good or bad, it matters not. Everything comes from Me; I ordain all things. Therefore live a life of faith knowing that both pleasure and pain, success and failure, come from Me.

Arjuna thought that the war depended on him. That was his egotism. Acts can only bear fruit through the grace and power of God. He is the distributor of *karmaphala*. If He withdraws, what would become of the results of any action? This however does not give us license. We must not be reckless—because God is just; punishment is as sure to come as fruits—but strive for the highest result. Offer Me the best that is in you. Be energetic, thoughtful and sincere. Then your work will be acceptable to Me and you will not go astray. It means that we should do what we consider right, trusting in the Lord. Thy will be done,

Lord. Accept my labour as an offering. It is a free gift that I offer to Thee. Therefore I have no right to the fruit of my labour. It belongs to Thee. If good results, I shall say, blessed be Thy name, and if the result is not as I had expected or hoped for, I shall still say, blessed be Thy name. But we must be sincere. Otherwise we may do as some robbers used to do in India.

Formerly there was a caste of robbers, the Thugs, who looked upon their profession as quite legitimate and honourable. They were born in that robber caste and they said that by birth it was their duty to rob. They made a religion of their own. And before they started out on their expeditions they made offerings to Goddess Kali and pledged that a certain part of the spoils would be offered to Her when they returned. We see that almost any act can be justified through argument. But we must guard against sophistry. Our hearts must be pure; we must be discriminative and self-controlled. Then there is no danger.

Quite different is a case like Girish Babu's. Sri Ramakrishna, on finding that Girish Babu could not perform any special work to please Him, told him to offer the fruit of all his deeds to him (Sri Ramakrishna), to resign himself entirely to him, to give him (as he expressed it) full power of attorney. Girish Babu consented. And being a sincere man, he carried out his promise to the letter. He took refuge in Sri Ramakrishna, he put his life in his hands, he became utterly resigned and de-

voted to him. He continued to carry on his ordinary duties, but the sense of egoism left him. He wrote better dramas than ever before. He acted on the stage as he had never been able to do before. He was called both the Shakespeare and the Garrick of India. But his life was offered to his Lord; he resigned all selfish motives; he thought only of Him.

That is the life taught by Sri Krishna in this eleventh verse, a life of blessedness for those who can live it. And if only we will try with a sincere heart, we too will be able to live such a life. The religious life is the most natural life, the easiest life. But we have gradually strayed away. We have allowed ourselves to come under Maya's hypnotic power, and so the natural has become unnatural and the un-

change of occupation often means rest, so we are sometimes rested and benefited by a change of practice in our religious life. If meditation becomes difficult we may fill that hour with other devotional exercises—reading, singing hymns, or repeating mantras. It matters little what we do, as long as the fire of devotion is kept burning.

Totapuri used to say, 'If the brass pot is not scrubbed daily, it will get rusty. So if a man does not practise devotions daily, his heart will become impure.' The perfect man alone need not practise anymore. Sri Ramakrishna told Totapuri that if the vessel be of gold, then it does not require daily cleaning. So the man who has reached God no more requires prayers and penances. But for ordinary men,

who have not yet reached the goal, devotional practices are very necessary. Love must be cultivated. It is a sincere longing after God. Pride and anger and sensual desires must be given up. And then we may find that Love which means eternal Peace and everlasting Bliss.

In the preceding shlokas, first, concentration of the mind on the Lord is enjoined. In case of inability to do that, *abhyasa*, or special practice of meditation, is advised. If one finds that to be too hard, the performance of action for the sake of the Lord has been taught. Those who can not do even this, who want to do things impelled by personal or other desires, are directed to give up the fruits of those actions to the Lord—not to anticipate, or build on, or care for the results, knowing them to be dependent upon the Lord. Those who cannot control their desire for work are taught to practise indifference to the effects thereof. The next verse, verse twelve, extols the path of abandoning the fruits of all actions.

The religious life is the most natural life, the easiest life. But we have gradually strayed away. We have allowed ourselves to come under Maya's hypnotic power, and so the natural has become unnatural and the unnatural has become natural.

natural has become natural. The easy path has become difficult and the difficult path appears easy. We are hypnotized into the belief that the universe is real and God unreal. This is our great misfortune and this has to change, if we shall ever be truly happy. Vedanta shows us how to bring about that change, offering the different paths as enumerated here by Sri Krishna. All paths lead us to Him and we may select whatever path best suits us. But we must travel onward, always going ahead; slowly it may be, but always moving. For unless we move on there will be stagnation and further growth will cease. We may change our method; we may change our practice when we get tired; but it is well to remember that to be at it, some way or other, is very necessary for speedy progress. Just as in any other labour, a

(To be continued)

Pushpanjali to Sri Sarada Devi

PRAVRAJIKA SHRADDHAPRANA

A strange thing has happened today. All of you know that Jagaddhatri Puja is just now going on as usual in Jayrambati. Is it not strange that instead of planning a pilgrimage trip to Jayrambati, we just decided to come north-west to Delhi? But the occasion is the same, the same auspicious occasion of Jagaddhatri Puja. So you find me here in New Delhi. This is part of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birth anniversary celebrations.

Her Growing Appeal

There is so little left to tell about Holy Mother that is not known or heard at all that anything I say can only be a repetition, and this I want to avoid. But how come this lady, Sri Sarada Devi, who found it difficult to come out of the nahabat to see even Sri Ramakrishna, sometimes for a whole month, is now moving round the world? This is not my exaggeration. It was Swami Vireswaranandaji who first made us conscious of this, when he said, 'Do you know the West now wants Mother more than Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda?' I was surprised, but now we know how true it is. I never knew I would come to Delhi for this occasion. Since the age of three or four, I have been in contact with the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Even now I fondly remember how the Ramakrishna Math and Mission created the Sarada Math and Mission. Even now when I mention Ramakrishna Math and Mission, I say our Ramakrishna Math and our Ramakrishna Mission; for it was they who made the Sarada Math possible. That was their mission, Swamiji's special message to them. That is why you find me here today instead of in Jayrambati.

So much has been discussed for a whole

year! I do not know if anything is left untold or unheard. The book *Janmajanmantarer Ma* was released on 16 December, when the celebration was going on in Sarada Math. You will be surprised to know that we were doubtful that we would be able to sell even 2000 copies. But before one fortnight had passed, every copy was taken. What made it happen? Mother is obviously coming to the forefront.

Who am I to talk about Mother? This is not the time for speech making; today is the time to offer *pushpanjali* and *pranamanjali* to Thakur, Ma and Swamiji, and of course, my special pranams to Ma Jagaddhatri during this her first puja in Delhi. So recalling one or two incidents should be more than enough for today.

Somebody asked Mother, 'There are very poor people who cannot afford to travel to Varanasi or any such holy place. How can they gain the merit which others visiting those places obtain?' And what was Mother's reply? She said, 'They can gain the same merit by visiting Dakshineswar or Belur Math, provided they have such genuine faith! He for whom one visits Varanasi is present at Dakshineswar and Belur Math.' That is one thing I remember.

Once Mother was asked, 'Well, people call you the *antaryamin*; are you really so?' She smiled a little and said, 'They say so out of devotion.' Mother specially taught us, again and again, to be humble, to be prayerful, and to always remember the goal of our human birth. She did not take this role upon herself. Sri Ramakrishna had told her more than once, 'Well, my dear, won't you do anything? Should I do everything single-handed? Is this only my responsibility? It is yours too. What, after all, have I done? You will have to do much more.' And that is true. Swami Gambhi-

ranandaji wrote the authentic biography, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, on the occasion of Mother's birth centenary. But now, fifty years later, if another biography were to be written, several chapters will have to be added to that book. Since then many more incidents have come to light. But then, as I said, this is not the time for a long speech.

I can only reminisce about what I have heard from the disciples of Holy Mother. Swami Madhavanandaji was then President of the Order and giving initiation. He once got a letter from a person seeking diksha. The candidate thought it his duty to describe his past life to his guru. He had led a miserable life. So Pramathanandaji, Madhavanandaji's secretary, said to him, 'Shall I ask him to come? You had better interview him.' Madhavanandaji replied, 'What! Did Holy Mother interview me before she initiated me? Had she done that, I would probably not have been blessed with initiation.' That was their attitude; they were never discriminating.

As I told you in the beginning, Mother is coming to the forefront; we have entered the Sarada age. And here in Delhi, you have invited Sarada Math to your celebration of Mother's 150th birth anniversary. For this I am grateful to all of you, and I take it to be your way of honouring Swamiji's words: 'Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India; hence it is her Math that I want first. We must first build a Math for Mother. First Mother and Mother's daughters, then Father and Father's sons. In this terrible winter I am lecturing from place to place and fighting against odds, so that funds may be collected for Mother's Math. I shall be relieved when you will have purchased a plot of land and establish there the living Durga, the Mother.' Although Swamiji did not live long enough to realize his dream, it is but natural that the wish of a person like Swamiji can never go in vain. It did come about and everything was done by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

Guiding Wisdom and Insight

There are many related incidents; I will mention only two. First, when the land for Belur Math was purchased, is it not strange that Sarada Devi was asked to do the first puja of Sri Ramakrishna in that old Math building at Belur? Why? She was not a sannyasini, nor had she performed Viraja Homa; she had rarely been seen doing puja in public. Even while giving initiation she always pointed to Sri Ramakrishna and said to the disciple, 'He is your guru.' If anybody asked, 'So who are you then?' she would just say, 'I am your mother.' She always assumed the role of the mother. Anyhow, why was Holy Mother invited to perform that first puja?

Second, Master Mahashay had then finished writing the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. But he was hesitant about publishing it. Girish Ghosh asked him the reason for it, because many in his place would not have said no. He said, 'You may get it after my death.' Something seemed to work inside him. He thought it was better to read out part of the *Gospel* to Holy Mother, and he did it. What was Mother's response? She said, 'You need not be afraid to publish them. It was the Master who left these words in your keeping. Now he is bringing them out according to the needs of the time. You should know that people's spiritual consciousness will not be awakened unless these words see the light of day.' So, even for publishing the *Gospel* they needed Mother's permission.

Again, when Swamiji was thinking of going to the West, Sri Ramakrishna had appeared to him in a symbolic dream, indicating that he should go. Still Swamiji thought of informing Mother. Mother took some time, but ultimately consented. When you hear this now, in 2004, it may not appear to be important, significant or surprising at all. But at that time, for any good Hindu to cross the ocean was a sin, not to speak of a sannyasin. So Swamiji needed Mother's permission. What idea could Mother have had about the West or

where America was? But she took a little time and sent him her consent and blessings.

In 1898 there was, as you know, a plague epidemic in Calcutta. Swamiji came down from Darjeeling. When sufficient funds for relief work were not forthcoming, he said, 'We shall sell the newly bought Math ground at Belur, if necessary! We are sannyasins; we must be ready to sleep under the trees and live on daily bhiksha as we did before. What! Should we care for Belur Math and possessions when by disposing of them we could relieve thousands suffering before our eyes!' Swamiji's gurubhais did not know how to stop him. Swami Shivananda suggested, 'Won't you take Mother's permission?' At this, Swamiji said, 'You have spoken correctly, Tarakda. I shall go this moment to get her permission.' And he went to Mother and, in his own forceful, appealing way, told her, 'Mother, there is no money to serve the plague victims. So I have thought of selling the Math property and using the money to continue our relief work. We are, after all, sadhus. We can pass our days living under a tree. We seek your permission.' What was Holy Mother's response? She said, 'No, my son, you cannot sell the Math. It does not belong to you. It belongs to Thakur.' Holy Mother Sarada Devi said that—she, who had not received even elementary education, in the modern sense of the word! As she saw it, one relief operation could not be allowed to exhaust the potentialities of Belur Math, and the entire struggle that had gone into bringing it into existence; Belur Math's mission was meant to cover the whole world, for a long period of time.

Adjusting to the modern age in a positive way, Swamiji himself had proclaimed that this was the time when Vedanta had to be preached to all and that Belur Math would have to do it—and Belur Math opened the Sarada Math. Why? As I said before, that was Swamiji's special order to the future sannyasins of Belur Math. And today I express my gratitude to them. I have come here. I feel

that all the respect, all the attention that is being shown to me is, in fact, being shown to Sri Sarada Devi. I have not come here to sit and speak before you as the President of Sri Sarada Math; that idea is not in me as I utter these words. I have come as a very humble servant of the Ramakrishna Sangha, which includes the Sarada Sangha. Swamiji himself thought so. Therefore I request you to go through the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi. Even Jogin Ma was assailed by doubt: she had seen the Master as a man of extreme renunciation, but found Mother so worldly-minded! Day and night she was occupied with her brothers, nephews and nieces. Of course Jogin Ma was fond of Mother, she had great regard and respect for her; and Mother also depended on Jogin Ma. Nevertheless, Jogin Ma had this doubt. Then, one day, as she was sitting on the banks of the Ganga trying to meditate, Sri Ramakrishna appeared to her in a vision and said, 'Look at the Ganga. Dirty things are floating on it, but can the Ganga be polluted at any time? Think of her [Sarada Devi] also in that way. Do not entertain these doubts. Know her and me as identical.'

The Prayerful Attitude

That is what I have learnt from Holy Mother's disciples. And I am happy that you made me express my real, deep sentiments about Mother in front of you all. Just now, I am looking at you as sons and daughters of Sri Sarada Devi; I forget that many of you are very distinguished citizens of Delhi. I do not know who you are, but I know you have come here to join me in my prayers, in my *pranamanjali*. I repeat, today is not a day for speech making; it is a time for *pranamanjali* and *pushpanjali*. So please join me and let us pray. Holy Mother taught us especially how to pray and what to pray for. Once she said to Nalini Didi, 'Please pray with me to the Master so that he may completely wipe away from my mind all trace of ego.' As we have already seen, Jogin Ma was told by Sri Ramakrishna to look upon him

and Holy Mother as one and the same. Sri Ramakrishna persuaded Sarada Devi to take up the responsibility of spreading his message and continue his mission. I remember what Swami Bhuteshanandaji once said. Somebody asked, 'How should we think of Holy Mother?' He said, 'We must learn from her how to pray, how to be humble, how to bow down before God. Holy Mother has taught us especially to be prayerful, to be humble, and nothing else.'

Now let us pray: 'Ma, make us your worthy children. Make us your worthy sons and daughters.' India is in great need of such people. I am not a very learned person, I am not a scholar; but since my childhood I have learnt certain things, picked up some sentiments from the very venerable swamis of the Order who made me aware of the requirements of our times. India has never been in lack of prophets or learned and religious persons. But

in the modern age, all their ideas and teachings have been expressed by and have been given to us through Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi. As I was looking at Holy Mother's picture in the temple just a few minutes ago, it occurred to me that what we need most today is the example of a true mother. That is very important. So let us pray that the worthy sons and daughters of today's India may become worthy fathers and mothers of tomorrow. That is what is necessary—good parents; good homes are what our children need today, in addition to good ideals. Lastly, they must know the value of human birth. If they lose this opportunity, where is the guarantee that they will be reborn once again as human beings? The supreme goal before us is God realization. Only in this human birth can we have God realization. Let us never forget that.

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Divine Guidance

One evening in Udbodhan I was working in the shrine. Mother was sitting on her cot. Yogin Ma asked me, 'How are you? How do you feel here?' I said, 'The work here is very monotonous. So if Mother is not here, many times I feel dry. There is nobody here who can teach (me) scriptures.' Mother said: 'Why should Thakur's seva become dry? One should analyse one's mind and find out why it feels dry? The mind gets accustomed to a particular environment; then it does not feel good when it is put in a different situation—the body and mind like to be in familiar circumstances. So pray to Thakur and you will see how he enlivens the mind. Moreover, in the early stages of spiritual practice it is not good to busy oneself day and night with scriptural study; the mind dries up. Think of Thakur's lila and you will see how the mind becomes invigorated. How beautifully Sharat has written the *Lilaprasanga*; and if one listens to Master Mahashay's *Kathamrita* one's whole being becomes refreshed. Read from Akshay Master's *Punthi* every day. If I were able to make some time, I too would listen for a while.'

Coming downstairs after some time, I saw a copy of the Bible somebody had left behind. The first thing my eyes fell on when I opened the book was this: 'And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.'

—Swami Vasudevananda

The Concept of God in the Vedas

SWAMI TATTWAMAYANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

From Many to One

At the earlier stages of spiritual evolution and metaphysical thought the Vedas mention the names of various gods and goddesses: Mitra, the Sun; Varuṇa, the god of night and of the blue sky; Dyu and Pṛthivī, the Sky and the Earth; Agni or fire god, the friend of all; Savitṛ, the Refulgent; Indra, the master of the universe; Viṣṇu (though not a major divinity in the Rig Veda), the measurer of the three worlds; and Aditi, the mother of all other gods (the Ādityas).

Gradually, however, we come across a tendency towards extolling a god as the greatest, controlling all other divine entities. This marks the progress of man's concept of God or the ultimate Reality from polytheism to monotheism, ultimately leading to monism. That is why the Rig Vedic rishi asks: '*Kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema?* To what god shall we offer our oblations?'¹ And again, '*Ko dadarśa prathamam jāyamānam?* Who saw the first-born?' (1.164.4)

The first mandala of the Rig Veda brings out this idea most beautifully:

इन्द्रं मित्रं वरुणमग्निमाहु-
रथो दिव्यः स सुपर्णो गरुत्मान् ।

एकं सद्भिर्षा बहुधा वदन्त्य-
ग्निं यमं मातरिश्वानमाहुः ॥

'They (the men of wisdom) call him Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni, and he is the heavenly, noble-winged Garutman. The Reality is one, but sages call it by many names; they call it Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan (and so on).' (1.164.46)

The idea that names may be many and different but they all denote the one God occurs in 'Viśvakarmā Sukta' too. Therein it is

stated:

यो देवानां नामधा एक एव

तं सम्प्रश्नं भुवना यान्त्यन्या ।

'The name-giver of the gods is one; other beings come to him to inquire.' (10.82.3)

Sampraśnam here refers to the two questions from the 'Nasadiya Sukta': '*Kaḥ veda?* Who had known?' and '*Kaḥ pravocad?* Who had announced?' These questions, which are in fact an enquiry into the one impersonal, attributeless, formless Principle behind all concepts of God, occur in the 'Hiraṇyagarbha Sukta' (10.121, cited above), in the *Shatapatha Brahmana* ('*Ko hi prajāpatiḥ?* Who is Prajāpati?'), and also in the *Aitareya Brahmana* ('*Ko nāma prajāpatirabhvat?* Who became Prajāpati?')

One of the grandest conceptions of God in the whole of Vedic literature is found in the last chapter of the *Shukla Yajur Veda Samhita*, which is known as the *Ishavasya Upanishad*. It is said that whatever there is in this world is to be filled and covered with *īśa* or Ishvara (*īśā-vāsyamidam sarvam*). God creates this world, then enters into everything. The idea is put forward even more forcefully in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*:

इदं सर्वमसृजत । यदिदं किंच । तत्सृष्ट्वा

तदेवानुप्राविशत् । तदनुप्रविश्य । सच्च त्यक्त्वाभवत् ।

'It created all this that exists. Having created (that) It entered therein. Having entered, It became the formed and the formless.'²

The Upanishad says that 'It' contemplated and projected (created) the universe, and then entered into the created objects and became one with both the manifest, gross and concrete creation as well as the unmanifest, subtle and abstract.

The universe is the abode of God. The Lord is the ruler of the universe as well as its indweller. The various aspects of gods and goddesses exist within the body of this Lord in their subtle and causal forms. At this stage He is called Prajāpati or Hiranyagarbha. The concepts of Prajāpati (the supreme Lord of all beings) and Viśvakarmā (the Creator in instrumental mode) constitute an important stage in the conception of God in the Rig Veda. The idea of a great deity who is the repository of all power and virtue was a gradual and natural process of growth.

Prthvī is the feet of this Lord; *antarikṣa* is his belly; *dyu* his head; the Sun and the Moon are his eyes; different corners of the universe are his ears. The microcosm and the macrocosm are the two dimensions of the same Ishvara. The concept of Prajāpati or Hiranyagarbha marks an advanced state of monotheistic evolution of Vedic philosophy. The question repeatedly raised in the famous 'Hiranyagarbha Sukta', '*Kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema?*' shows that polytheistic conceptions of the Godhead had been left behind by then.

Anthropomorphism at an advanced monotheistic level is revealed in the 'Purusha Sukta', which is widely used in a number of rituals. The sukta says: '*Puruṣa evedaṁ sarvaṁ, yadbhūtaṁ yacca bhavyam*'; Purusha is all this world of movable and immovable objects. He constitutes the past, the present and also the future.'

The Purusha of the 'Purusha Sukta' is the manifested state of unmanifested *kāraṇa brahman*. Possessed of an infinite number of heads, eyes and feet, he has enveloped the whole of his creation. He manifests as *virāt*, the sum total of all existence. Depicting the macrocosmic dimension of creation, he reminds us of the essential unity and oneness of existence, the unity of God and His creation. The 'Hiranyagarbha Sukta' announces: '*Hiranyagarbhaḥ samavartatāgre bhūtasya jātaḥ patireka āsit*'; Hiranyagarbha was present at the beginning; when born, he was the sole lord of created be-

ings.' (10.121) From this stage it is only a small step to the Advaitic concept of an ultimate Reality without name, form or attributes.

The Concept of God and *Ṛta*

Ṛta is the cosmic order that guides not only the individual life of man, but also the totality of universal life. So, a god is sometimes called *ṛtavān* and a goddess *ṛtavi*. The god Varuṇa is supposed to be the custodian of *ṛta*, which, according to Vedic seers, is praised and glorified even by the devas. The Rig Veda calls Viṣṇu *ṛtasya garbha*, the embryo of *ṛta*. The dawn, the sun, the moon, in fact the entire universe, is based on *ṛta*. The twenty-third sukta of the fourth Rig Vedic mandala, addressed to the god Indra, ends with the glorification of *ṛta*. As a moral principle it encompasses the psychological life of individuals. As the cosmic Order or eternal Law it is responsible for the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness. *Ṛta* integrates chaos into cosmos, gives order to the universe and shows the righteous path for the mind to follow. It is the psychological principle teaching man how to lead a moral life. Thus we can see that according to the Vedic seers, the same ideal functions as the guiding principle for individual as well as universal life. That is why in the first sukta of the Rig Veda itself, addressed to Agni, the sages call their deity *ṛtasya didivīm*, the illuminator of truth.

The Concept of Self-surrender in Vedic Literature

It may be interesting to note here that even the concept of *prapatti* or *śaraṇāgati* (the path of self-surrender through total subservience to God), usually associated with the bhakti tradition, has its origin in the Vedas. This supreme ideal of devotion consists of six factors:

आनुकूल्यस्य सङ्कल्पः प्रातिकूल्यस्य वर्जनम् ।

रक्षिष्यतीति विश्वासः गोप्तृत्ववरणं तथा ।

आत्मनिक्षेपकार्पण्ये षड्विधा शरणागतिः ॥

A sattvic motive, abstinence from all

kinds of disservice to God, conviction and unflinching faith in the saving grace of the Lord, seeking His grace, complete self-offering, and longing for the earliest extinction of this worldly existence constitute the six forms of self-surrender.³

The 'Varuṇa Sukta' found in the seventh mandala of the Rig Veda is, perhaps, the origin of the ideal of self-surrender which later became an essential element of Vaishnavism. In the first four mantras the rishi is repeatedly asking Varuṇa to have mercy on him, to bestow joy and happiness on him. He is craving for mercy and favour:

मो षु वरुण मृन्मयं गृहं राजन्नहं गमम् । मृळ्य सुक्षत्र
मृळ्य ।

'May I never go, royal Varuṇa, to a house made of clay; have mercy, Almighty, have mercy.' (Rig Veda 7.89.1)

The word *nyāsa* is often used to mean the *śaraṇāgati* ideal that is normally denoted by *prapatti* in Vaishnava devotional scriptures. For example, it is said in the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* that self-surrender is the highest form of austerity: 'Etānyavarāṇi tapāmsi nyāsa evātya-recayat.'⁴ It is also stated that, '*nyāsa iti brahmā, brahmā hi parah;* renunciation is Brahmā, and Brahmā is the Supreme.'⁵

Some of the Vedic statements, which form the origin of the six elements of the *śaraṇāgati* ideal, may be identified as follows:

हंसः शुचिषद्वसुरन्तरिक्षस-
द्धोता वेदिषदतिथिदुरोणसत् ।
नृषद्वरसदृतसद्वयोमसदब्जा

गोजा ऋतजा अद्रिजा ऋतं (बृहत्) ॥

'He is the sun dwelling in the heavens, the air dwelling in the sky, Vasu (the appointer of the stations of all creatures) in the mid region, the fire existing in the altar (the *agni* on earth), the guest in the house; He dwells among men, among the gods, in Truth and in space. He is born in water, born on earth, born in the sacrifice, and born in the mountains. He is the Truth. (He is the Great One).'⁶

The idea of sattvic motives, *ānukūlyasya saṅkalpa*, that is reflected in the pervasive vi-

sion of the Supreme in the above mantra, has been expressed even more forcefully in the Rig Vedic shanti mantra beginning '*Vāṇme manasi pratiṣṭhitā mano me vāci pratiṣṭhitam;* May my speech be based on (be in accord with) my mind; may my mind be based on my speech.'

The ideal of complete abstinence from all types of negative action or disservice (*prātikūlyasya varjanam*) is indicated in the Rig Vedic mantra:

त्रातारो देवा अधि वोचता नो

मा नो निद्रा ईशत मोत जल्पिः ।

'Saviour gods, speak favourably to us; let not sleep, nor the censurer overpower us.' (8.48.14)

Similarly, different aspects of the ideal of *śaraṇāgati* are found in the following Vedic mantras:

त्रातारमिन्द्रमवितारमिन्द्रं

हवे हवे सुहवं शूरमिन्द्रम् ।

ह्वयामि शक्रं पुरुहूतमिन्द्रं

स्वस्तिनो मघवा धात्विन्द्रः ॥

'I invoke, at repeated sacrifices, Indra, the preserver, the protector, the hero, who is easily propitiated—Indra, the powerful, invoked by many. May Indra, the lord of affluence, bestow prosperity upon us.'⁷ (Faith in the saving grace of God.)

त्वं हि नः पिता वसो । त्वं माता शतक्रतो बभूविथ ।

'O Bounteous One! You are our father and mother.'⁸

त्वयेदिन्द्र युजा वयं प्रति ब्रुवीमहि स्पृधः ।

त्वमस्माकं तव स्मसि ॥

'O Indra, with you as our helper, let us answer our enemies. You are ours and we yours.'⁹

The well-known shanti mantra of the *Krishna Yajur Veda* beginning with '*Saha nāvavatu;* May He protect us', reflects the soul's yearning to take refuge in God, *gopṭṛtva-varaṇam*.

Offering prayers, performing Vedic rituals to various gods and goddesses and leading an integrated life of pursuit of the path of artha and kama without deviating from the path of

dharma, in complete harmony with nature and the rest of creation—this was the guiding ethical principle of Vedic society. To understand the idea of God conceived at the early stages of Vedic thought, it is essential to take note of certain fundamental features of the Vedic scheme of life. The social life portrayed in Rig Veda reveals certain interesting features. Monogamy, sanctity of the institution of marriage, domestic purity, a patriarchal system, a just and equitable law of sacrifice, and high honour for women were some of the noteworthy features of the social life during the Vedic period. We find the Vedic seers praying for fullness of life:

तच्चक्षुर्देवहितं पुरस्ताच्छुक्रमुच्चरत् । पश्येम शरदः शतं
जीवेम शरदः शतं शृणुयाम शरदः शतं प्रब्रवाम् शरदः
शतमदीनाः स्याम शरदः शतं भूयश्च शरदः शतात् ॥

May we see the sun rise a hundred autumns. May we live a hundred autumns, hear (through) a hundred autumns, speak (through) a hundred autumns, and be happy and contented a hundred autumns, nay, even beyond these years.¹⁰

The Origin of Advaita

In the Bhagavadgita, Sri Krishna himself says that those who are devoid of proper knowledge of the real purport of the Vedas and the proper method of propitiating the Almighty, are deluded by ignorance. They think that they themselves are capable of performing Vedic sacrifices, even without the help or grace of God.¹¹

One of the most striking depictions of the relation between the macrocosm and the microcosm, the absolute and the relative, the ultimate cause and its effect (*kāraṇa brahma* and *kārya brahma*) and the assertion that both are, in reality, infinite, full and perfect, occurs towards the end of the *Shukla Yajur Veda Samhita* in the shanti mantra for the *Ishavasya Upanishad* beginning with '*Pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidaṁ*'; That (supreme Brahman) is infinite, and this (conditioned Brahman) is infinite.'

Several portions of the *Shukla Yajur Veda*

Samhita (for instance, the '*Rudrādhyāya*') contain ideas that are strikingly Advaitic in content and form. Some mantras of the '*Purusha Sukta*' (which occurs in the *Shukla Yajur Veda* as well) are interpreted even by Sayanacharya in Advaitic terms. Commenting on the mantra beginning with '*Paridyāvā prthivi sadya itvā parilokān paridiśaḥ parisvaḥ*'; Having gone swiftly round the earth and heaven, around the worlds, around the sky, around the quarters', Sayana states: 'Here the nature of jiva is Brahman.'¹²

Similarly, the *Krishna Yajur Veda Samhita* too is full of mantras which have an Advaitic content. The *Tandya Brahmana* and the *Sama-vidhana* of the Sama Veda are equally rich in Advaitic ideas. So also the Atharva Veda.

The literal meaning of Advaita has been explained by Madhusudana Saraswati as 'that in which there is no twofoldness'. Shankara's Advaita *siddhānta* is not only the climax of philosophical speculation and the highest philosophy of ethics, but also a way of life. As the culmination of man's metaphysical contemplation and spiritual evolution it is the natural final goal of our spiritual sadhanas. In fact, some of the most beautiful Upanishadic verses which Shankara has interpreted in the light of Advaita occur in the *Samhita* portion of the Rig Veda. For example, the following mantra traditionally associated with the *Mundaka Upanishad* (3.1.1) is found in the Rig Veda as well:

द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया
समानं वृक्षं परिषस्वजाते ।
तयोरन्यः पिप्पलं स्वाद्वत्त्य-
नश्चन्नन्यो अभिचाकशीति ॥

'Two birds that are ever associated and have similar names, cling to the same tree. Of these, one eats the fruits of divergent tastes, and the other looks on without eating.'¹³

The mantra brings out the essence of Advaita philosophy and the identity of jiva and Brahman. The bird on the lower branch is the jiva and the one sitting on the upper branch of the tree as witness, without eating

fruits, is God Himself. This mantra shows that though its philosophical and logical perfection is reached in Upanishadic literature, the origin of Advaita philosophy is, in fact, to be found in the *Rig Veda Samhita* itself.

The well-known 'Devi Sukta' (10.125) is another striking example of a Samhita mantra depicting Advaitic experience. The word *cikituṣi* in the third mantra of this sukta is explained by Sayana as:

चिकितुषी यत्साक्षात्कर्तव्यं परं ब्रह्म तज्ज्ञातवती
स्वात्मतया साक्षात्कृतवती ।

'She (the rishi) had known or realized as her own Self the supreme Brahman, that which must be realized.'

Innumerable mantras of the *Rig Veda Samhita* have been explained by Sayana in an exclusively Advaitic sense.

The Rig Veda gives a great message in the first mantra of the thirteenth sukta of the tenth mandala. This is perhaps the most forceful expression of man's divinity and immortality found in the whole of Vedic literature. It runs as follows:

युजे वां ब्रह्म पूर्वं नमोभि-
र्विश्वेक एतु पथ्येव सूरैः ।
शृण्वन्तु विश्वे अमृतस्य पुत्रा
आ ये धामानि दिव्यानि तस्थुः ॥

'O my sense organs and their presiding deities, I salute you (that is, I merge you all with the eternal Brahman through meditation). May this hymn of praise spread everywhere through the medium of the wise. May you all, children of immortal Bliss, and all those living in the bright (divine) worlds, listen to me!'

The famous 'Nasadiya Sukta' (Rig Veda 10.129) contains the most sublime depiction of Advaitic monism that was later elaborated upon in the Upanishads and expounded by the great Shankaracharya. In this hymn all

phenomena are traced to the one Principle which is beyond opposites like life and death, existence and non-existence, being and non-being, day and night, and so on. The one Reality is neither existence nor non-existence; it is beyond name and definition. The concept of maya, which explains why the perfect Reality appears as this imperfect world, has its roots in the 'Nasadiya Sukta'. Here we may very well remember that Advaita is, after all, a matter of inner experience ('*anubhavaikavedyam*; known through experience alone', in the language of Shankaracharya) and not a subject for philosophical speculation.

The 'Nasadiya Sukta' is perhaps the most scientific description of the ultimate Reality as well as of the projection of the phenomenal world. It makes the relative and the Absolute, nature and Spirit, the twin aspects of that one Reality and shows that men of wisdom (*kavayajhi*), who had controlled their senses, found out the ultimate cause of this world (which appears to be real) in their own hearts (*hṛdi*) through concentrated intellects (*manisā*). ~

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4. *Taittiriya Aranyaka*, 10.62.
5. Ibid.
6. Rig Veda, 4.40.5.
7. Rig Veda, 6.47.11; Atharva Veda, 7.86.1.
8. Rig Veda, 7.98.11; Atharva Veda, 20.108.2.
9. Rig Veda, 8.92.32.
10. *Shukla Yajur Veda*, 36.24.
11. See Ramanuja's commentary on Bhagavad-gita, 15.15.
12. Sayanacharya's commentary on *Shukla Yajur Veda*, 32.12.
13. Rig Veda, 1.164.20.

The Vedic hymn is 'a means of spiritual progress for himself (the rishi) and for others. It arose out of his soul, it became a power of his mind, it was the vehicle of his self-expression It helped him express the God in him, to destroy the devourer.'

—Sri Aurobindo

Western Philosophic View of Religious Language

DR LEKSHMI RAMAKRISHNAIYER

Language is the chief tool for effective communication. Be it science, politics or religion, it is language that plays the crucial role in the propagation of axioms and ideas. There are different kinds of languages that are peculiar to the physical, natural, and social sciences. But whether there is any specific language in the discourse of religion is a question that needs to be discussed and analysed. If we undertake a comparative study of different religions the world over, it becomes quite clear that there is no specific or universal language of religion. This is because unlike other sciences, which are purely empirical in their nature, religion is fundamentally an experience or awareness involving transempirical elements within its ambit.

Religion as a system of lived experiences includes the first-order language through which we communicate our feelings, thoughts and actions in relation to an object of devotion. Galloway defines religion as 'man's faith in a power beyond himself whereby he seeks to satisfy emotional needs and gains stability of life'.¹ Here, faith in a power beyond man is regarded as the essential feature of religion. This power has the ability to satisfy the emotional nature of man; that is, it responds to man and his prayers seeking help in troubled moments or expressing gratitude in the hours of victory. This means that religion is a matter of commitment to an object of devotion or an attitude to life. But since neither commitment nor attitude can be deemed cognitive, religious statements or utterances too cannot be counted as cognitive; they cannot be regarded as either true or false like scientific ones. But though empirically unverifiable, religious statements are not meaningless. The significance of religious language in human life cannot be sim-

ply brushed aside. Religion as a distinct kind of commitment has its own field and its own distinctive language.

Language analysis is one of the fundamental tasks of a philosopher. Though we can find sophisticated elements of linguistic analysis in the Vyakarana, Nyaya, Mimamsa, Jaina and Buddhist schools of Indian thought, linguistic analysis as a school of philosophy is mainly a western thought movement. A good number of western theologians have dealt with religious assertions as if they were empirical. However, Ludwig Wittgenstein in his philosophical investigations came up with the view that religious language is used not to convey any information about a fact but to tell people to live with a picture, though not a picture which can be sensed. One very old view is that theistic statements are quasi-cognitive; they are said to be analogical in nature. Besides these, there are a number of other theories holding the view that theistic assertions are non-cognitive.

A recent development in the philosophy of religion is much occupied with the problems concerning the religious uses of language. One such is that concerning the descriptive terms applied to God and another is that dealing with the basic function of religious language.

John Hick has pointed out that many of the terms that are applied to God are used in a special sense and differ from the way they are used in ordinary mundane contexts. When it is said that God is great, God is love, or God is good, it does not mean that God occupies a large volume of space or that God has a physical body which expresses itself in a range of actions. In cases where a word occurs both in secular as well as theological contexts, its secu-

lar meaning is primary in the sense that it has developed first and has acquired an established meaning of its own. The meaning that such a term bears when it is applied to God is an adaptation of its secular use. Consequently, terms like 'great', 'love', or 'good', when applied to God in religious discourses, raise a number of questions. There are different opinions among philosophers regarding the status and meaning of such terms and the function of religious language.

Analogical Expression

In the Christian tradition, the philosophers of the scholastic period like St Thomas Aquinas developed the doctrine of analogy to explain the nature of religious language. Aquinas says that when a word such as 'good' is applied to God, it is in a different sense from that used in relation to human beings. According to him 'good' is applied to God and man neither univocally nor equivocally but analogically. Qualities like goodness, love and wisdom are the perfect qualities of the Godhead that are known to us only by analogy.

When we say that God is good, we are saying that there is a quality of the infinitely perfect Being that corresponds to what at our own human level we call goodness. ... It is the divine goodness that is the true, normative and unbroken reality, whereas human life shows at best a faint, fragmentary and distorted reflection of this quality. Only in God can the perfections of being occur in their true and unfractured nature: only God knows, loves, and is righteous and wise in the full and proper sense.²

Aquinas is sure that we do not know what perfect wisdom or perfect goodness is like. The doctrine of analogy intends to indicate the relation between the different meanings of a term when it is applied both to humanity and to God. He further states that we know that God is but we have to take the help of analogy when we want to know what He is like.

The doctrine of analogy derives its force from the assumption that cause and effect are similar in nature. Men and other finite things

have been created by God. So finite creatures reflect the nature of their creator, God. 'Terms signify God to the extent that our intellect knows Him. And since our intellect knows God from creatures, it knows him to the extent that creatures represent Him.'³

Symbolic Statements

Paul Tillich has discussed the symbolic nature of religious language in his works like *Systematic Theology* and *Dynamics of Faith*. In this view, all theological statements concerning God—that he is the creator, a good and personal being, and so on—are symbolic. To Tillich 'religious faith, which is the state of being "ultimately concerned" about the ultimate, can express itself only in symbolic language.'⁴ He says that a symbol participates in the reality to which it points. A symbol opens up our vision to dimensions of reality (as also our own being) that otherwise remain unrecognized. A symbol deals with the ultimate and the fundamental symbol of our ultimate concern is God.

According to Tillich, in the notion of God two elements can be distinguished—the element of ultimacy or the Being of God, which is not a symbol, and the element of concreteness, which is borrowed from our experience and is symbolically applied.⁵ A Christ or a Krishna has both the elements: the ultimate concern and a concrete image of what concerns a believer ultimately.

Tillich further expresses his view that a symbol has truth: it is adequate to the revelation it expresses. No symbol should be treated as an existential thing. If a symbol is objectified and secularized in the form of a thing, then it is no more a religious symbol. Every symbol points to the infinite, which it symbolizes, and the finite, through which it symbolizes. Hence it is finite-infinite. 'It forces the infinite down to finite things and elevates and opens up the finite things for the divine.'⁶

A symbol is a statement which a believer makes with all his heart, soul and strength.

The true awareness of the transcendental or ultimate reality, which the symbol represents, is an existential grasping of it. Hence no symbolic statement can be impersonally, literally or factually true; that is to say, they cannot be classified as true or false like cognitive judgments. They are authentic or inauthentic—authentic when they evoke an ultimate concern for man's destiny or when they represent the transcendent with an immediate awareness. But symbols are not merely expressions; they have their root in reality: 'They are not merely different subjective ways of looking at the same thing. They have a foundation in reality, however much the subjective side of man's experience may contribute.'⁷ Tillich, however, says that the sole literal and non-symbolic statement that can be made about the ultimate reality called God is that God is Being-itself. All other theological statements about God are symbolic.

Religious Language as Non-Cognitive

As a matter of historical fact, many religious people have taken such statements as 'God is love' to be not only cognitive but also true. However, recently there have been a number of theories that treat religious language as non-cognitive. Three of such theories are discussed below.

In his book *The Role of Knowledge in Western Religion*, J H Randall holds that religion works with a body of symbols and myths which are both non-representative and non-cognitive. According to him they have a four-fold function:

First, they arouse the emotions and stir people to actions; they may thereby strengthen people's practical commitment to what they believe to be right. Second, they stimulate cooperative action and thus bind a community together through a common response to its symbols. Third, they are able to communicate qualities of experience that cannot be expressed by the literal use of language. Fourth, they both evoke and serve to foster and clarify our human experience of an aspect of the world that can be

called the "order of splendour" or the Divine.⁸

This fourth statement of Randall's is rhetorical. To him the Divine is a mental construct, a product of the human imagination and not the creator or ultimate ruler of the universe. As John Hick rightly points out, this way of thinking has led to the replacement of the word 'God' by 'religion', a use that is becoming widespread today. In contexts pertaining to God and His nature or purpose, the corresponding notion, which is of concern today, is religion, its nature and function.

This attitude has resulted in a shift in focus in the type of issues that presently interest both the student of religion as well as the common man. One is less interested in questions about the existence of God and the validity of religions than about the utility of religions. God's existence may be doubted, but not that of religions. It may not be very discreet to question the truth of religions; opinions about utility, however, appear more consonant with the spirit of scientism.

A profound view about the non-cognitive nature of religious statements is offered by R B Braithwaite. He holds that religious statements, especially ethical ones, express or dictate a general policy or a way of life. For example, a Christian's assertion that God is love (agape) is an indication of his intention to follow an agapeistic way of life. Though not empirical, in his view, religious statements have meaning: 'A theistic statement may be empirically vacuous but then it has meaning, for theists do talk and understand one another.'⁹ Braithwaite holds that a theistic statement is primarily a moral statement backed by stories. According to him, it is not necessary that these stories be true, but they act as psychological aids for people to resolve upon and carry through a course of action. A great many times the moral policy of action goes against one's psychological temperament; but when it is associated with a parable, the resolution to carry it out comes spontaneously. However, the fundamental characteristic of a religious state-

ment is the resolution to follow a way of life and not the story with which it is invariably associated. The story has no truth claim. Braithwaite holds that religious statements are a matter of existential decision making and commitment to a certain way of life and action.

Another view of religious language as non-cognitive comes from R M Hare. He, like the later Wittgenstein, conceived language as a kind of game with many possible rules of play. Scientific or factual use is not the only context for the use of language. Hare holds that religious statements are both prescriptive and descriptive. According to him, religious statements do not describe facts but express our attitude to facts. A statement expressive of an attitude to facts may be called a 'blik' statement.¹⁰ Blik is the mode or manner in which things appear to a perceiver in the light of his deep-seated disposition. Bliks, according to Hare, are neither true nor false: they determine whether something is perceived as fact or illusion. Hare says that religious statements are blik statements. In his view, just as Kant regarded causal necessity to be an a priori or non-empirical blik of the scientists of his day, God as the source and cause of beings is a blik.

The blik theory of Hare seeks to emphasize two things: First, belief or disbelief in God may not have any predictive value concerning facts; yet it makes a great difference to the world of theists. Second, he holds that religious statements are not factual assertions; yet a religious belief is never bereft of factual reference. Bliks, according to Hare, may include faith and commitment. A religious blik is right or wrong in relation to a certain religious com-

munity accepting a certain prescriptive religious value. He does not hold that religious bliks are indispensable but says that they are ultimately matters of personal decision and commitment which help to choose a kind of life we want to live.

Religious language, whether we describe it as analogical, symbolic or non-cognitive, is unique, and its uniqueness is something which springs from the uniqueness of what that language is about. The language of religions is one that tries to comprehend the incomprehensible. As Sri Ramakrishna says, 'No one can say with finality that God is only "this" and nothing else.'¹¹ Though not definitive, religious statements can act as ladders for people groping in worldly darkness to reach transempirical heights. ~

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The Dawn of Meaning

Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cold stream gushed over my hand she spelled into the ether the word *Water*, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motion of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought, and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that w-a-t-e-r meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free!

—Helen Keller

Indian Philosophic Prose in English: A New Historicist Perspective

DR SUMITA ROY

The use of English for the exposition of Indian philosophy has opened up new avenues of interpretation involving pluralistic responses and redefinitions growing out of already existing tenets. Beginning as it does with the predominantly zealous missionary approach, which was an attempt by thinkers such as Carey, Marshman, Ward, Monier-Williams and others to find footholds for Christianity, through the memorable episode of European philosophical responses to India represented by Hegel, Schelling and Schopenhauer, followed by the Orientalists of the stature of Muller and Farquhar responding to the neo-Hindu inclusivism of Ramakrishna, Keshab Chandra Sen, Vivekananda and such others, to the later engagement and preoccupation with ideas of Indian philosophy by eminent Indians for social reform and national and cultural revival—the dimensions of Indian philosophic prose in English spread over areas as diverse and extensive as politics, religion, sociology, economics, ethics, culture, spirituality and so on, thus putting an end to narrow, authoritarian, critical tenets prescribed for the study of philosophy. Also, here the foregrounding of English as a language of discourse where the original Sanskrit is no longer privileged offers an important shift in the politics of Indian thought.

The continuing tension between Western responses and indigenous interpretations, the conceptual frames formulated to accommodate Western assumptions in order to invest Indian thought with a sense of universal acceptability, the impact of Indian philosophic and religious texts on the Western consciousness, and their global dissemination due to the use of English have considerably altered the

philosophic and religious maps of the world.

Considering this, it is interesting to approach the issue in question from the perspective of New Historicism. In his seminal work *The New Historicism Reader* (published in 1994 by Routledge) Aram Veesser gives the five fundamental assumptions of New Historicism thus: 1) every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices; 2) every act of unmasking, critique and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes; 3) literary and non-literary 'texts' circulate inseparably; 4) no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths or express unalterable human nature; and 5) a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism together participate in the economy they describe.

The present paper attempts a survey of the New Historicist perspective of Indian philosophic prose in English based on these assumptions.

Embedded Texts: Written and Non-Written

The expressive acts of Indian philosophy from its earliest oral tradition—the Vedas, Vedanta, Puranas, Itihasas, Yoga, Mimamsa, bhakti poetry and music—have been influenced by and in their turn have also influenced the dominant material practices of their respective ages. Coming to the origin and development of Indian philosophic prose in English over the last two centuries, the discussions generally begin with Raja Ram Mohan Roy, whose contribution most often acclaimed is largely restricted to the field of political and social activism. This marginalizes the fact that these had their foundation in his

vast acquaintance with Hindu philosophic texts which he commented upon in English. Till recently his writings have failed to receive due recognition. The quality of embeddedness indicated by Roy's *Vedanta Chandrika* and such other works is as obvious as it is in Vivekananda's thoughts on the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita. Gandhi's use of ahimsa, the dominant ideal of Jainism, to give direction to the nationalist movement, Tilak's reinterpretation of the Bhagavadgita in justification of the lesson of violence for justice taught to Arjuna, Dayananda Saraswati's 'purification' of Vedic knowledge for inculcating a temper of self-confidence and his insistence on the universal global significance of the Vedic teachings are all illustrations of one crucial idea: in all of these philosophy was a response to the external challenges of life.

Philosophy as an academic discipline was more or less the forte of British intellectuals teaching in India. One of the first notable Indian representatives of the academic aspect of philosophy and its concepts was K C Bhattacharya, who was followed in this task by his son Kalidas, his student R V Das and his admirers G K Malkani and T R V Murti.

Subversion and Conformity

Though much of this early philosophic engagement was a subversion, directly or indirectly, of English hegemony, it is noteworthy that the basic act of condemnation also involved an act of conformity. For instance, European models of philosophic discourse were widely accepted and emulated. Ram Mohan Roy's particular hermeneutic system appeals to and reflects upon different traditions, simultaneously appropriating the alien while he asserts himself to be against the alien.

Though the terms 'Renaissance' and 'Reformation/Revival' have been commonly associated with the rise of Indian philosophic prose written in English, the term 'neo-Hinduism' is preferred in academic contexts. This brings to the fore the debate about suitable ter-

minology and lexicographic problems which received much attention from thinkers such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. The Sanskrit exclusivism and the vernacular popularized by the Pali canon brought out ideas such as Buddhism being the fulfilment of Hinduism and the approach to ancient systems through the concept of practical Vedanta. Similarly the support of Hindu orthodoxy by people like Madan Mohan Malaviya resulted in the uplift of untouchables, who were then designated as 'harijans', the people of God.

Fluidity of Discursive Truth

Philosophy was no longer merely metaphysical speculation aimed at bringing out the intellectual brilliance of thinkers; instead it gained ethical and social currency. It acquired an imaginative and symbolic dimension, became more descriptive and contemplative. For instance, the literary masterpieces of Bankim Chandra underlined the philosophic ideal of *anushilana* (repeated practice); Rabin-dranath Tagore, in his turn, advocated a personalistic absolutism and considered beauty and harmony of God's creative act as a fitting subject for both literature and philosophy.

The source of inspiration in the case of Devendranath Tagore was his own heart, in contradistinction to the privilege given to revelatory scriptures by other Brahmos. Here the fourth of Veeseer's assumptions comes into play because both imaginative and archival discourse shows the alterable nature of truth. Keshab Chandra Sen borrowed from Christianity, while Vivekananda categorized the West as materialistic/pragmatic and the East as spiritual/impractical. Aurobindo attempted to establish the identity of Hinduism not by return to the past nor by asserting its timeless validity; for him it was the source of vitality and change, openness for question and experiment. Coomaraswamy spoke in defence of tradition in Hinduism through his criticism of Radhakrishnan, who, he felt, had

failed in the task of actualizing and modernizing the tradition, as had several others. Krishnamurti did not show allegiance to any particular philosophic system or tradition and spoke of spiritual truths as lying deep within oneself, to be realized by one's own effort. It was the unique privilege of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Ramana Maharshi to bring an experiential dimension to the expression of philosophic truths. The tolerance and universal dimension of Ramakrishna's spiritual message and the silence of Ramana, which is as eloquent as his words of wisdom, bring new levels of truth to philosophic discourse. But, of course, this was not the last word. It has been said that Vivekananda's use of the teachings of his guru Ramakrishna was styled in his own peculiar way to suit his purpose, for his ideas of mass-education and philanthropy were not directly mirrored in the teachings of Ramakrishna.

Discourse as Participation

Talking of the last of Veese's assumptions, the long engagement of thinkers all over the world with Indian philosophy imparts it a market value not far to seek. The appearance of Vivekananda at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893 was the beginning of Indian thought's taking root in American soil. At the outset it was 'Vedanta and the West' but by the turn of the last century the juxtaposing conjunction 'and' had been replaced significantly by a preposition of involvement—'in'—so that now one speaks of 'Vedanta in the West'. Popular forms such as Transcendental Meditation, International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), and personalities like Rajneesh, Mahesh Yogi, Swami Rama and others have captured the Western imagina-

tion.

Radhakrishnan, notwithstanding his alleged lack of originality, was one of the most successful spokespersons for neo-Hinduism in the West—as memorable as he was persuasive. His relentless crusade began with his objection to the European verdict of ethical deficiency in Hinduism in addition to its unsuitability to scientific progress. B N Seal went a step further and upheld the potential of Hinduism to bring about a European renaissance. Bhagavan Das articulated the opinion that philosophy should not be an end in itself as it was in Europe—a more or less intellectual engagement. He advocated the need for a practical philosophy helpful to man and society. P R Damle viewed the future of Indian philosophy as one of revival and constructive exposition of non-monistic and non-idealistic systems of thought. In all of these, the attempt is to make philosophy acquire a saleable value and the oft-repeated attempt to justify it in scientific terms of reference is just one more attempt in this direction.

Finally, it is significant that the terms *darshana* and *tattvajnana*, which are often used synonymously for philosophy in India, are pointers to the fact that philosophy has always been a mode of living, viewed as a perception that gives life its balance. Since philosophy is only one of the modes of presenting Indian thought to the world, it has to be seen in conjunction with literature, art and other areas of intellectual endeavour. As the New Historicist contention underlines, literary and non-literary texts circulate inseparably and therefore a complete picture is one which keeps all modes of presentation in view before any conclusive documentation is given shape. ~

का भाषा का संस्कृत प्रेम चाहिए साँच ।
काम जु आवै कामरी का लै करिअ कुमाच ॥

It is true love that is necessary, not language or flowery speech. If a blanket is enough to keep oneself warm, what is the use of a silken shawl?

—Tulsidas

The Prose Style of Swami Vivekananda

PROF. U S RUKHAIYAR

Swami Vivekananda has been studied generally as a saint and philosopher. Unfortunately, his prose style has seldom received due literary attention. A close study of his style shows that it possesses, in ample measure, all the qualities of good prose. It has simplicity and clarity, rhythm and harmony, a fine use of figures like similes and metaphors, epigrams and paradoxes, and also subtle effects like euphony and cacophony, assonance and consonance. He first places a point and then effortlessly expands it through cogent logic and/or apt analogies.

About style, Vivekananda said: 'Simplicity is the secret. My ideal of language is my Master's language, most colloquial and yet most expressive. It must express the thought which is intended to be conveyed.'¹ Thus, according to him, a good style must be simple, colloquial and expressive. Bernard Shaw also said: 'Effectiveness of assertion is the alpha and omega of style.'² These are the qualities that characterize the style of the great masters of English prose like Dryden and Swift, Shaw and Hemingway.

As regards classification, Vivekananda's style may be termed expository as distinguished from the descriptive, the argumentative or the persuasive. Expository prose is generally informative or thought-provoking. The effectiveness of such prose depends mainly on its clarity and lucidity, which Vivekananda's prose has in adequate measure. But on occasions it turns towards the persuasive without losing its original character.

In terms of rhythm, its main pattern is associative, turning sometimes to prose rhythm and sometimes to the poetic. But the distinctive feature of his style is the harmonization of all the essential elements of style into an or-

ganic whole.

Plain Language, Straightforward Manner, Informal Tone

Vivekananda often uses an imperative sentence in an informal and colloquial manner: '*Be like the pearl oyster*';³ '*Feel like Christ and you will be a Christ; feel like Buddha and you will be a Buddha*' (2.307); '*Control the mind, cut off the senses, then you are a Yogi; after that, all the rest will come. Refuse to hear, to see, to smell, to taste; take away the mental power from the external organs*' (7.71); '*This world is not for cowards. Do not try to fly*' (6.83); '*Bring in the light and the evil goes in a moment.*' (2.357) Such sentences have a very direct and powerful appeal. We must not forget that many of his works have been speeches, whose effects are heightened by such imperative sentences carrying the sense of advice. They remind us of biblical prose.

He often introduces his point in the form of a question and then answers it. Sometimes there are questions after questions, and then there are answers. This method arouses a greater degree of inquisitiveness in, and invites the participation of, the reader. 'What is education? Is it book-learning? No. Is it diverse knowledge? Not even that.' Now, as curiosity increases, the answer follows: 'The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful is called education.' (4.490) And further: 'What makes a compound? A compound is that in which the causes have combined and become the effect.' (5.256)

How Vivekananda Develops an Argument

Vivekananda first places a point and evolves it gradually with the help of logic

(now deductive, now inductive) and analogy. Talking about 'The Cosmos and the Self', he says: 'Everything in nature rises from some fine seed-forms, becomes grosser and grosser, exists for a certain time, and again goes back to the original fine form.' Then follow illustrations:

Our earth, for instance, has come out of a nebulous form which, becoming colder and colder, turned into this crystallised planet upon which we live, and in the future it will again go to pieces and return to its rudimentary nebulous form. This is happening in the universe, and has been through time immemorial. This is *the whole history of man, the whole history of nature, the whole history of life*.

Every evolution is preceded by an involution. *The whole* of the tree is present in the seed, its cause. *The whole* of the human being is present in that one protoplasm. *The whole* of this universe is present in the cosmic fine universe. Everything is present in its cause, in its fine form. (5.255)

What the speaker wants to say has been stated clearly in the first sentence of the passage: 'Everything in nature ... original fine form.' Then he gives the analogy of the formation of the earth, and then of the seed and the tree, and at the end, of the human being present in essence in the protoplasm. Here the speaker has followed the method of inductive logic. He avoids unnecessary elaboration or references that sometimes confuse the point.

Further, the repetition of *the whole* five times emphasizes the main point. Such a device brings in force, especially in oratory. In another example Vivekananda endorses the need of variety in our ways of life:

You cannot make all conform to the same ideas: ... If you and I and all who are present here were to think exactly the same thoughts, there would be no thoughts for us to think. We know that two or more forces must come into collision in order to produce motion. It is the clash of thought, the differentiation of thought, that awakes thought. Now, if we all thought alike, we would be like Egyptian mummies in a museum looking vacantly at one another's faces—

no more than that! Whirls and eddies occur only in a rushing, living stream. There are no whirlpools in stagnant, dead water. When religions are dead, there will be no more sects; it will be the perfect peace and harmony of the grave. But so long as mankind thinks, there will be sects. Variation is the sign of life, and it must be there. (2.363-4)

The above-quoted passage shows very well how Vivekananda first states and then elaborates his point. It is also marked by the deft use of analogies. The passage contains three of them—of collision, of Egyptian mummies, and of whirlpools and eddies. All three of them are variants of one another. Thus, in this passage, the stylistic device of the speaker is characterized by the use of inductive logic with apt analogies. The last sentence sums up the gist of what is implied in the first.

Analogy

Vivekananda is a master of analogy. A good analogy is one that shows a close correspondence between the major and minor terms of reference. 'Now, true Art can be compared to a lily which springs from the ground, takes its nourishment from the ground, is in touch with the ground, and yet is quite high above it.' (5.258) This observation contains the very essence of art, and needs no elaboration. Further,

The bee came to sip the honey, but its feet stuck to the honey-pot and it could not get away. Again and again, we are finding ourselves in that state. That is the whole secret of existence. Why are we here? We came here to sip the honey, and we find our hands and feet sticking to it. We are caught, though we came to catch. We came to enjoy; we are being enjoyed. We came to rule; we are being ruled. (2.2)

This brings out very well the image of man stuck in the temptations of the world. Also mark the smart and witty statement containing a fine paradox: 'We are *caught*, though we came to *catch*.'

Let us take another example. While delivering a lecture in America, he said about India:

'It is like a gigantic building all tumbled down in ruins. At first sight, then, there is little hope. It is a nation gone and ruined.' (8.73) This analogy of a gigantic building tumbling down sums up admirably India's great fall.

Some more apposite analogies: 'The vibration of light is everything in this room: why cannot we see it everywhere? You have to see it only in that lamp. God is an Omnipresent Principle—everywhere: but we are so constituted at present that we can see Him, feel Him, only in and through a human God' (4.122); 'Talk does not count for anything. Parrots can do that. Perfection comes through the disinterested performance of action' (4.137); 'If this room is full of darkness for thousands of years and you come in and begin to weep and wail ..., will the darkness vanish? Strike a match and light comes in a moment.' (2.357)

Simile

Vivekananda also makes skilful use of the simile, a figure of speech that resembles the analogy: 'Like fire in a piece of flint, knowledge exists in the mind; suggestion is the friction which brings it out' (1.28); 'Man is like an infinite spring, coiled up in a small box, and that spring is trying to unfold itself' (1.389); 'Today we are doing one thing, tomorrow another. We are like little bits of straw rocking to and fro in water, like feathers blown about in a hurricane.' (4.122)

About the sum total of good and evil, he says: 'It is like old rheumatism: Drive it from one place, it goes to another.' (4.241)

All the above-quoted similes show a fine correspondence between the major and minor terms of reference. Further, as is evident, the correspondence is at several levels, which makes the similes even more appropriate.

Metaphor

Vivekananda's metaphors are still more expressive. In his famous Chicago address he said: 'Is man a tiny boat in a tempest, raised one moment on the foamy crest of a billow and

dashed down into a yawning chasm the next?' (1.10) This passage calls for an elaboration. What is this tempest? And what is this sea? The sea, in this context, is the world, full of trials and tribulations. The tempest is the upheaval in life caused by the uncontrolled senses. Man is but a tiny boat. Mark the contrast between the vastness and depth of the sea and the leap of the waves on the one hand, and the size and strength of the boat on the other. This metaphor has a fine visual impact too.

Incidentally, this imagery reminds us of several such observations in religious books. In the Gita (2.67) Krishna says to Arjuna: *Indriyāṇāṁ hi caratām yaṁmano'nuvidhiyate; tadasya harati prajñāṁ vāyurnāvamivāmbhasi*. Dr Radhakrishnan translates this as follows: 'When the mind runs after the roving senses, it carries away the understanding, even as a wind carries away a ship on the waters.'⁴

Vivekananda's metaphor of the boat is followed by another: '(Is man) a little moth placed under the wheel of causation which rolls on crushing everything in its way and waits not for the widow's tears or the orphan's cry?'⁵ This metaphor looks like a variant of the metaphor of the tiny boat. In both the speaker asks if man is as small as a tiny boat or a little moth, helpless before the mighty sea of temptation or the inexorable wheel of causation.

But in the same lecture the speaker also says: 'And every soul is a young eagle soaring higher and higher, gathering more and more strength, till it reaches the Glorious Sun.' (1.17) The eagle provides a sharp contrast to the moth; it is a strong bird and, in Indian mythology, it has also a sacred association. So then, man is like an eagle, soaring higher and higher till he reaches the glorious Sun, his destination. Derozio too, in his poem *My Native Land*, compared enslaved India to an eagle in chains.

Does this speech not look like a piece of creative writing in which the images take on a pattern and try to develop, sustain and repeat the leitmotif through parallels and contrasts?

Similarly: 'The world is a grand moral

gymnasium wherein we have all to take exercise so as to become stronger and stronger spiritually.' (1.80) Here the word 'gymnasium' has been given a spiritual dimension. Thereby Vivekananda also extends and enriches language.

At one place we find a queer conceit, say a metaphysical conceit, the like of which is often used by poets like John Donne: 'He (a yogi) does not show himself to men, and yet he is a magazine of love and of true and sweet ideas.' (1.105) Here the word 'magazine' has been used in the sense of 'a chamber for holding a supply of cartridges to be fed automatically to the breech of a gun' or 'a store of arms, ammunition, and provision for use in war'. One might like to ask why a saint who has all along been talking of love and peace has chosen to use the image of arms and ammunition. The answer is not difficult to find. Life is also a battle, where evil is the enemy. It is the weapon of love that can defeat the enemy and win the battle. This analogy contains a fine paradox. The champions of English metaphysical poetry, especially the likes of Donne, would have waxed lyrical on this metaphor.

The following metaphor also shows evidence of this element: 'Look not for the truth in any religion; it is here in the human soul, the miracle of all miracles—in the human soul, the *emporium* of all knowledge.' (1.355) The word 'emporium', as all of us know, means 'a large retail store selling a wide variety of goods' or 'a centre of commerce, a market'. We hear of khadi emporiums, leather emporiums, and so forth. Both meanings are related to commerce. Now one may like to ask if the soul is a centre of commerce, a market where things are sold and purchased. Yes, just possible. The soul gives and receives innumerable things. We know Wordsworth imagined the human soul as a great giver and receiver. We can profit by selling and purchasing rightly. Here 'selling and purchasing' suggest the exchange of things spiritual between partners in the commerce for betterment of life. This too is an ex-

ample of metaphysical conceit. Such a conceit is frequently seen in George Herbert, another noted metaphysical poet.

Consider another striking metaphor of this very species: 'The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women.' (8.198) When we talk of the role of women in the progress of society, we generally use the analogy of the two wheels of a chariot or the two wings of a bird. But this thermometer metaphor startles us, though its appropriateness is illuminating. It shows the originality of Vivekananda's creative imagination. Does it not have something of Thomas Browne, who wrote of religion with the images of science?

Finally, a metaphorical passage that needs no elaboration: 'What are we but floating wavelets in the eternal current of events, irresistibly moved forward and onward and incapable of rest?' (4.139)

Epigram

Vivekananda has also made judicious use of epigrams: 'The external teacher offers only the suggestion which rouses the internal teacher to work to understand things' (1.93); 'Religion is a constitutional necessity of the human mind' (1.318); 'A (sacred) book is the most tangible form of God' (4.44); 'The message makes the messenger. The Lord makes the temple; not vice versa' (7.65); 'What is the future but the present illimitable?' (4.215); 'Great convictions are the mothers of great deeds.' (5.30)

(*To be concluded*)

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Blake's Truth

PROF. ASOKE BASU

I noticed recently a stanza from one of William Blake's poems that I had first read in high school:

To see the world in a grain of sand,
And heaven in a wild flower;
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.¹

The stanza answered a spiritual question for me: What is God? The most typical way of conceptualizing God is in thinking that His nature is perfect, His authority the highest. God is thought of as external to human beings. Often He is represented as an ideal, a deity or a sacred object. Some view Him in existential terms. Here it is suggested that God is prior to and transcends all forms. Any human attempt to represent the existence of God is futile, because such attempts draw a boundary around an essential and qualitative Being which is boundless and undefinable. God *is*. It is as simple as that. Then there are others for whom God is a utilitarian concept. Marxists opine that God is a concoction, a ploy created by the rich and powerful to keep the rest from changing their own socioeconomic conditions. Karl Marx's epigraph on religion was that 'Religion is the sigh of the creature overwhelmed by misfortune, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.'

However, what is common among all three perspectives—supernatural (that God is external to us), existential (that God exists a priori), and social (that God is man-made device just to keep the poor happy)—is that there is a superior authority that is known through a belief system.

God in Small Things

The God that Blake evokes in the afore-

said verse is a conscious and direct act of living and experiencing life. His is the way in which we perceive and understand, by means of our conscious self, the wholeness inherent in the smallest part. God is in and of 'small things'. He can be realized personally by our own human experiences in the interplay of reason and emotion, logic and feeling. In this straightforward approach, God is located not in a distant, mysterious segment of the cosmos but in the natural world. Sacredness is a subjective attitude which can be witnessed within the stream of secular actions and temporal events. God, or God consciousness, is in all things, like flavour in a fruit. Blake experiences this grand Truth in a 'grain of sand' or in a 'wild flower'.

The capacity to find the meaning of God is in each of us. What portends 'spring' is, in Blake's metaphor, the manner in which we choose to learn of our true identity, and accordingly endeavour to locate its source. All living beings have the same point of origin. Therefore it is fundamental that we humans participate in nature. Everyday acts and observations, however mundane, allow us to purify and transcend our body and mind and reach the spiritual Self. The poet wants us to conceive and experience the art of linking the grandest with the minutest. In this light of consciousness the bond between the world and the soul is revealed.

The knowledge of our Self is intuitive. As all life arose in the dawn of silence, it is in silence that we experience the eternal One. The Upanishads inform us that true knowledge is intuitive experience, *samyag-darshana*. If we so choose and act, it is to the One that we can return and find liberation therein. Most religious texts refer in their own distinctive way

to the cycle of change—birth, life, death, re-birth—until the self unites with the original Source which Blake's verse apprehends.

Approaching God Directly

Now, let us raise what is perhaps the boldest question of our times: Why is there so much disturbance, so much fighting and quarrelling in the name of God?

Of late, opinion makers, media analysts, educators and theologians have theorized about possible factors associated with the increasing tension between and among religious faiths. In addressing the theological debate between Christianity and Islam, the most common civilizational reference is to the modernization of the Christian belief system—the Protestant Reformation initiated by Martin Luther. The effects of the Reformation were manifold. It shaped Europe's political destiny and emboldened Europeans with a rational-scientific mind. Later, the Puritan Pilgrim Fathers sailed out of England and colonized North America. Their 'new' institutional ethos promoted the rise of the liberal democratic state. At the core of this social transformation, religion played a decisive role. Max Weber's much applauded thesis is that the Protestant ethic of hard work, acquisition of material goods, duty reformed by piety, nobility of character, and a moral view of self in secular action, fuelled the rise of capitalism. Pursuing this point of view, the theorists suggest an entirely traditional, subjective, exegetical and canonical view of Islamic theism, which has, even in its present phase, remained hagiocratic in Christian view.

It would be simplistic, if not altogether naive, to conclude that the so-called 'civilizational crisis' can readily be categorized as 'traditional' or 'modern', or for that matter, 'holy' or 'profane'. In the gusts and eddies of thought and action tradition and modernity can both be conformist in the sense that divine or state-sponsored rules govern the lives of men and women. What is important to note

here is that Martin Luther essentially freed the common spirit in all people. The truth is that God can be directly approached by all because each of us is a potent seed of knowledge. Accordingly, Luther proclaimed that indulgences need not be purchased from the Church as a 'surplus' grace to protect the self from sin or for absolution.

This approach to realizing truth is by *direct* experience. To quote Vivekananda:

What right has a man to say he has a soul if he does not feel it, or that there is a God if he does not see Him? If there is a God we must see Him, if there is a soul we must perceive it; otherwise it is better not to believe. ... Man wants truth, wants to experience truth for himself; when he has grasped it, realised it, felt it within his heart of hearts, then alone, declare the Vedas, would all doubts vanish, all darkness be scattered, and all crookedness be made straight.²

A religion that requires the primacy of faith cannot disavow an appeal to a 'higher' authority. The religion that Blake and Vivekananda refer to can best be described as 'independent witnessing' of the Self, the core of the personality. External institutional aid in aiming for gods as well as goods can be grist to the mill only if we learn to separate those attributes that point to the universal Self from those which bring an understanding of the concrete self alone. Reason and emotion are both essential tools in this empirical process until we break out of darkness into dawn's light and are able to universalize ourselves. Just as rational beings can reach for universal values as reasonable moral judgements, so can pure emotions lift the fog of our dyspeptic desires and direct us to the path of happiness. Together, they indicate to us a direct experience of Self-knowledge, where reason is not independent of emotion. ~

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Glimpses of Holy Lives

The Sadhu of Rishikesh

There is a sadhu in Rishikesh who gets up early in the morning and stands near a great waterfall. He looks at it the whole day and says to God: 'Ah, you have done well! Well done! How amazing! He doesn't practise any other form of japa or austerity. At night he returns to his hut.

—Sri Ramakrishna

Rishikesh and its environs in the Himalayan foothills are the traditional habitat of sadhus. Countless sadhus have lived there practising varied austerities and spiritual disciplines according to their temperament and spiritual orientation.

Today Rishikesh is a well-connected bustling town, housing the administrative offices of the district headquarters, and boasting of most basic urban amenities. But when Mahendranath Datta first went there in 1894 he had to walk through dense forest infested with tigers and wild elephants. Rishikesh itself was no better than a jungle with just the odd temple or two, a couple of dharmashalas, and no shops. There were, of course, several sadhus, living in small grass huts. A big pipal tree by the fast-flowing Ganga acted as a natural rendezvous for sadhus where they gathered for their frugal lunch distributed by the almshouse of Kali Kamliwala. There were many stones of varied shapes lying around and one had only to pick one up, wash it in water and use it as a plate. After meals the sadhus would continue with their personal routines—some read the Gita, others immersed themselves in contemplation.

Humbler than a Blade of Grass

One morning, when it was time to collect alms, Mahendranath was struck by the appearance of an elderly sadhu making his way to the almshouse. He appeared to be in his

eighties and was fairly well built. But what was remarkable was the great respect that his very presence elicited from the other sadhus. Making way for him, they stood motionless, waiting for him to collect his rotis first before they took their turn. Mahendranath's curiosity was fuelled and he soon found his way to the sadhu's hut, which was not far from Kali Kamliwala's almshouse.

The hut itself presented a strange sight. It comprised all of four wooden sticks at the corners with some creepers stretched overhead—a semblance of an awning. The floor was strewn with pebbles and stones amidst which sat the sadhu, clad only in a *kaupina* of birch leaves. The hut had a serene quietness and a peaceful, meditative air. As Mahendranath approached the sadhu, he was greeted with a kindness that was touching: '*Ayiye, Guru Maharaj; Welcome, Master.*' Moved by this expression of love Mahendranath proceeded to touch the sadhu's feet, but the latter made it known, without saying as much, that he did not like such things.

Mahendranath settled down on a stone by the sadhu's side. 'I have not been able to practise as much austerity as did my guru,' said the sadhu, and then fell silent. He was sitting on his heels, his knees tucked below his chin, his hands joined together in salutation, and with a distant look in his eyes. A long time passed and not another word was exchanged. The sharp pebbles under Mahendranath's feet hurt and his legs began to ache. So he finally got up and withdrew from the hut, leaving the sadhu alone in his reverie.

But Mahendranath was feeling an irresistible attraction. He now began visiting the sadhu whenever he found time—morning, afternoon or evening. The sadhu spoke but one

sentence, '*Ayiye, Guru Maharaj.*' No other word was exchanged. He was like a living statue, motionless; and Mahendranath too would sit quietly in his presence. He was about twenty-five years old, restless and fidgety by nature, but in the sadhu's presence all restlessness vanished. He would start on his visit planning to ask one question or another, but once in the sadhu's presence all questions would simply dissolve. The sadhu's perpetual meditative mood was infectious and Mahendranath's mind would effortlessly quieten down in his presence. He did not make any attempt at japa or meditation, nor did he ask the sadhu for any help, but the sadhu's very presence induced in him a meditative state of mind. It was as if a power was emanating out of him engulfing anyone who happened to be in his presence.

The old sadhu's face radiated an ethereal peace and tranquil joy. He would always be found squatting, be it day or night, his half-closed eyes bearing the inward gaze of the mother bird sitting on her eggs that Sri Ramakrishna described as the mark of a yogi. The greeting, '*Ayiye Guru Maharaj*', was reserved not for men alone. A monkey or a dog or a squirrel stealing into his presence would be greeted with the same words. Even the fall of a leaf would at times evoke the same response. However, when he was more withdrawn, the sadhu would hardly be conscious of his surroundings. Squirrels would then run all over his body and he would not know it.

Forbearing as the Tree

Even at other times, the sadhu seemed to be scarcely aware of his body. Sometimes he would be found strolling barefoot on the hot sands of the riverbank in the burning afternoon sun, when one would think twice before venturing out.

Once a couple of young troublemakers, who had arrived from the plains dressed as sadhus, decided to test the sadhu's nonchalance. They collected some leaves of the poi-

sonous wild hemp plant, rolled them into a ball, and having fried it with some chillies offered it to the sadhu at his lunch. The sadhu cast his benign glance first at the youngsters, then at the deadly fry. Then he calmly ate it along with his rotis! After taking his usual sip from the Ganga, he retired to his squat as if nothing had happened.

The sadhu's deportment reminded Mahendranath of the legendary Rishabhadeva, the first of the twenty-four Jaina tirthankaras and the father of Bharata, from whom India derives its name. Of royal birth and possessed of auspicious qualities, Rishabha mastered the Vedas at a young age. He then married Indra's daughter Jayanti, led the life of an ideal householder—helpful, peaceful, unattached and beneficent, and ruled according to dharma—his rule being marked by justice, propriety and prosperity. Yet Rishabha was a free soul. He was pure in heart and had realized his oneness with Brahman. When his son Bharata came of age, Rishabha relinquished the throne and assumed the life of a wandering *avadhuta*. He was honoured in some places and abused in others, but his equanimity was never disturbed. He had attained yogic powers but paid no heed to them. He communicated with none and would therefore often be taken as deaf, dumb, drunk, or mad. On occasions he would take to *ajagara vritti*, remaining immobile in one place, as if inert, for days together. Having realized oneness with God, he was free of attachment to the body. His body was simply working out the momentum of karma till it burnt itself out in a forest fire at the foothills of the Kutakadri.

The legacy of Rishabhadeva and the sadhu of Rishikesh is alive to this day. One can still meet in the vicinity of Rishikesh sadhus who, when asked their name, are likely to answer: 'Just as flowing rivers disappear into the sea, losing their names and forms, even so the wise man, freed from name and form, attains to the self-effulgent Purusha, who is higher than the high.'

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Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

The Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā of Utpaladeva. *Ed. and trans. Raffaele Torella.* Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. E-mail: mlbd@vsnl.com. 2002. liv + 272 pp. Rs 650.

A knowledge of Buddhism is indispensable for a right understanding of the different systems of Indian philosophy in their mutual relation and in their opposition to Buddhism. Ninth-century Kashmir was a major hub of Buddhism, and Somānanda was the first author who stood up to have a word against the Buddhists. We find the roots of the Pratyabhijñā philosophy in his work *Śivadr̥ṣṭi*. The topic of *pratyabhijñā* was not dealt with at length in this work of Somānanda. The principles of the Pratyabhijñā system were later elaborated by Utpaladeva in his magnificent work *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā*. The intricate and brusque discussions of Buddhist logicians (Yogācāra) and Śaivites form the substance of this text.

This profound work of Kāśmīr Śaivism was followed by a number of commentaries, two of which were composed by the author himself and called the *Vṛtti* and the *Vivṛti*, the latter being more elaborate. It is a matter of great concern that we have lost Utpaladeva's *Vivṛti*, on which we have an exceptional and elaborate commentary called *Vivṛti-vimarśinī* by Abhinavagupta. Abhinavagupta also wrote the *Vimarśinī*, a commentary on the *kārikās* themselves, without which the text of Utpala would have been absolutely unintelligible. The *Vimarśinī* and the *Vivṛti-vimarśinī* are both published from the Jammu and Kashmir Research and Publication Department in two and three volumes respectively.

We have here a brilliant and complete edition of the *Vṛtti*. The *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* along with its incomplete *Vṛtti* was published under the Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies in 1918 and was edited by Pandit Madhusudan Kaul. Prof. Torella has critically edited the *Vṛtti* for the first time and pub-

lished a complete edition of the text with the help of a unique Malayalam manuscript discovered by him at the Oriental Research Institute and Manuscripts Library, Thiruvananthapuram. He has also made exquisite use of incomplete manuscripts of the text from Kashmir.

The text edited by Prof. Torella is an exceptional piece of work and stands as an outstanding specimen of a critical text. Based exclusively on the modern principles of textual criticism, the learned author has added a lucid and authentic translation of both the *kārikās* and the *Vṛtti*. Along with the translation the author has also added critical notes and explanations that are of vital importance. For instance, he cites every now and then relevant quotes from the *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivismarśinī* that are extremely constructive in making many of the testing concepts comprehensible. In his explanatory notes the author has discussed many points in detail. Many concepts that are not obvious from the text itself become clear from Torella's explanations.

An additional vital aspect that is reflected all the way through this work is Prof. Torella's profound acquaintance of Buddhist logicians. Wherever considered necessary he generously quotes from the Buddhist sources. He has a thoughtful awareness of the Yogācāra teachers, namely Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, Dharmottara, et al.

A worthy effort was made jointly by Professors K A S Iyer and K C Pandey to translate the *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī* that was well done for sure. But Torella has maintained his lucidity and transparency of thought in his translation as far as the *kārikās* are concerned. Immediately after the publication of Torella's translation we have noticed a new translation made by Prof. B N Pandit and published by the same publisher. But one should note that Pandit's edition does not meet the standard of the former's work. Undoubtedly, the hard toil and labour Torella has put into making this edition is clearly reflected in his work.

The book contains an elaborate and thought-provoking introduction which scans through the

whole of the Pratyabhijñā system, its birth, pedigree, development in Kashmir and the scope for further research. A bibliography and two indices make the book more useful for research students.

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From the Unreal to the Real. *Swami Bhashyananda*. Sri Ramakrishna Math, 16 Ramakrishna Math Road, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. E-mail: srkmath@vsnl.com. 2003. xii + 347 pp. Rs 50.

'*Asato ma sadgamaya*; From the unreal lead us to the Real.' This Vedic mantra has voiced and also embodied man's eternal quest down the ages. This quest is in every person's heart, in every person's endeavour, in every breath and step. Every karma, whether scientific or non-scientific, spiritual or secular, the most ordinary to the extraordinary, down to the most insignificant thought in the mind, has this basic drive. This is what is impelling man; this is the history of man writ large; this is man's true destiny, for man is born to live in Light. What a wonderful destiny man is heir to!

But today most people are not aware of this greater design in their lives, and this unawareness, non-recognition, is pulling them down into the quicksand of meaninglessness and purposelessness. Once this quest for the Real is kept in mind, it will bring fulfilment in life resulting in joy and happiness. What this book does in various ways is bring about this awareness that we are, through all our struggles, wending our way to the Real. A new kind of energy flows in with this awareness and turns our faces towards the Light, towards the Real.

Swami Bhashyanandaji was highly respected and loved and was the head of Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago; he impressed people more through his character and life than words. But then words too are tinged with a person's character and though the author is no more, this book gives us a glimpse of his spiritual stature. *From the Unreal to the Real* comprises, in part, a collection of his transcribed lectures and class talks, besides his notes, spanning about two decades of teaching Vedanta in

the United States. The swami had, during his ministry, come in contact with many types of people and their varied problems, both psychological and spiritual. This experience obviously revealed to him the root problem modern people face, and endowed with this insight he helped many souls. The author himself reviewed the material before this book was first published in the United States. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, has now brought out the first Indian edition.

The work is divided into four parts: a) Religion, b) Hinduism, c) Spiritual Practices, and d) Sri Ramakrishna. The topics cover spirituality, psychology, yoga, philosophy, and related issues, and all these are interspersed with quotations from Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita. All through the book one finds the language simple and sometimes astonishingly clear—and above all practical. The theme of the book is how to raise ourselves spiritually from the darkness of ignorance we are all steeped in. The high points in the book are many and the wonderful way the swami addresses complex problems by looking beyond them for answers is novel.

The first two parts spread out the ideas in general. The third starts shaping these ideas into the basic attitudes and disciplines imperative for a religious aspirant to enable him or her to have the intuitive experience that transcends ordinary sensory consciousness. The last part deals specifically with Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, for the spiritual power that this holy trio have unleashed for the good of the world is tremendous. Today, those who want to be spiritual in the true sense of the term are drawn irresistibly by their love. The book is dedicated to Swami Virajanandaji, the sixth President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. A short introduction by Swami Vyomarpurandara and a helpful foreword by Sam Fohr complete the book. The references and index given at the end are exhaustive.

Swami Chidananda, the present head of Vivekananda Vedanta Society, has helped in substantially subsidizing the book so that it is available to and can help a greater number of people. The publisher has spared no pains in making the book very presentable.

Swami Satyamayananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

Gītā for Success in Modern Life. R S Garg. New Age Books, A-44 Naraina Phase I, New Delhi 110 028. E-mail: info@newagebooksindia.com. 2003. xi + 250 pp. Rs 250.

The importance of the Bhagavadgita has been accepted in all ages. Since time immemorial this small book of the Song Celestial has been studied by scholars and interpreted according to the prevalent needs of society. There was a time when man's mind was involved with external rituals alone; society was burdened with *karma kanda*—the mere performance of various sacrifices. The philosophical aspect of Vedic culture was at its lowest ebb. To save society from being a brainless mechanical institution, the path of knowledge was introduced and the Gita was interpreted by Sankaracharya and his followers as professing only knowledge. After some time, the grand path of knowledge turned into a wrestling ground for dry logic and lost its initial attitude of sincere search for truth.

Then started the era of devotion, bhakti. Ramanuja and other Vaishnava saints, while interpreting the Gita, emphasized those aspects which deal with devotion and self-surrender to God. Always remembering the name of Vasudeva, worshipping and serving Him with one-pointed mind, as well as surrendering oneself totally to the divine Will was considered the best way. However, this too, at a later period, created some problems for society. People became overly emotional, lazy and weak. They, under the grip of inertia, lost all enthusiasm for work. Whenever misfortune befell, instead of facing the situation boldly and trying to change it with a strong hand, they would simply blame their fate and God, and weep. In the recent past, therefore, we find a new type of interpretation of the Bhagavadgita emphasizing action and strength. Leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, and Mahatma Gandhi all penned new interpretations of the Gita. Now it is a different tune: performance of action, detached selfless action, for the good of society, the nation, and humanity at large.

But oh, the world has again changed! Now it is no more the problem of one particular country; all problems are global problems now. Global activities have increased immensely and so have ambition and restlessness. Now the world is a world of corporate enterprise, and society is consumers' so-

ciety. There is competition everywhere, there is demand for new products everyday, and to satisfy these demands a group of highly paid people are spending sleepless nights! High blood pressure, insomnia, indigestion and heart problems are some of the ailments which have become very common among this affluent class. Excessive tension is the cause. There is achievement but no enjoyment. The problem is universal. *Gita for Success in Modern Life* is mainly written for those ambitious young people who want to be successful in their worldly life. But to be really successful, to have both material prosperity and mental peace, modern man has to undergo a change in his attitude towards his life and action. It is here that the Gita has its relevance.

The message of the Gita is not just for the spiritually inclined; it can be of help to everybody in all walks of life. According to the author, it does not teach renunciation of the world, but performance of one's actions skilfully, living a normal life, here in this world. The secret of skilful action, he points out, is detachment. One can have skill only when there is detachment from results. But action for material prosperity and detachment from the result seem contradictory. Garg explains it by saying that if one's mind is preoccupied with the thought of the result, he cannot concentrate on the action fully, and therefore there is a chance of failure. Though difficult, this indeed is a very practical point!

The book consists of fourteen chapters apart from the introduction. The first chapter is on the contemporary relevance of the Gita. Garg points out that though visible religious practices and religious discourses by men of God have increased, particularly in urban India, yet there is a near-total collapse of ethical values which is suicidal for both the individual and society. Here, the philosophy of the Gita alone can help. According to him, it is more relevant now than it was in ancient times. For the entire life of modern man is at stake in terms of peace and mental and physical health. He is acting all the time, no doubt, but often with a wrong frame of mind, generating unhealthy action.

In the second chapter the author discusses the philosophy of the Gita as a practical policy. First he shows the relevance of the Gita regarding physical health. Avoidance of all extremes and living a moderate life, with proper food and sleep, is necessary for health. The Gita divides the food habits of men into *sattvika*, *rajasika* and *tamasika* categories. Of course, *sattvika* food is the best suited for both

meditative as well as active life. Garg also points out that the Gita prescribes proper sleep—neither sleeplessness nor over-sleeping is good for health. A disciplined life is the first step to success. Discipline requires mind control. Anger, hatred, attachment, and the like disturb the mind and do not allow one to think calmly and rationally. Peace and harmony are necessary not only for a spiritual person but also for company personnel, as they have to deal with many people and solve various problems. In fact, mental control is the key to success in all walks of life.

The third chapter, 'Peace and Harmony', deals with these concepts as presented in the Gita. The fourth chapter, 'State of Mind and Action', deals with the Gita teaching of detachment from the result of action. The fifth chapter is on faith as a positive force. Here all the verses of the Gita dealing with shraddha have been examined and analysed. The author points out that faith comes first, followed by wisdom and later by experience. It is an important stage in self-growth and self-realization. As a positive force it is essential for all achievements in life, whether spiritual or secular.

The sixth chapter deals with self-control. The Gita, being mainly action-oriented, concerns itself with individual growth, but it is not oblivious to the social cause. Self-control is necessary for self-growth as well as for the development of society. Not only does a self-controlled man have excellent relationship with others, but he also sets an example before society. This is what the Gita means by *lokasangraha*. Every action of a successful man should be such that others might wish to imitate him. The author has given a detailed account of the functions of the senses and shown why sense control is necessary both for individual as well as for social good.

The seventh chapter is on desire, anger and fear, which, according to the Gita, are interlinked. The author believes that desires cannot be wiped out or eliminated altogether but what the Gita suggests is control over these desires. Desires give rise to struggle, and are often accompanied by the fear of failure. Fear of failure is worse than failure itself. Unfulfilled desires are followed by anger, bewilderment and ultimately destruction. Garg gives various examples of this from modern life.

The eighth chapter deals with the philosophy of the Self. The Self, from a metaphysical point of view, is neither the doer nor the enjoyer of the re-

sults of action. It is Prakriti, or Nature, that is responsible for all action. In case of human action also it is one's nature that makes one act; the Self is, in reality, detached from all activities. It is due to ignorance that one thinks the soul to be the doer.

In the next four chapters, namely, 'Work without Concern for the Results', 'Work without Selfish Desire', 'Work as Sacrifice', and 'Work as Duty', the author discusses the Gita philosophy of action, and at the same time shows its relevance in the modern world. Selfishness does not help in the long run. In the next chapter, 'Pairs of Opposites', the Gita teaching of indifference towards the pairs of opposites like pleasure-pain, heat-cold, profit-loss, and victory-defeat has been considered. The last chapter discusses the topics of death and after-life. The Gita preaches the immortality of the soul and the existence of rebirth. Death and rebirth have been compared to the act of changing clothes. If one can take it in this light, then one can easily cross the ocean of sorrow. Though modern man is not much interested in the liberation of one's soul from the cycle of birth and rebirth, yet that is the main teaching of the Gita. The author is silent about this very important aspect of the Gita teaching.

The author, who had been in the Indian Foreign Service, has travelled widely. The book also reveals that he is a well-read person. Many interesting anecdotes and references from different literary sources have enriched the work and made it very interesting. At the same time, the eternal value of oriental wisdom enshrined in the Bhagavadgita is presented with thorough sincerity. Young people would benefit by reading this book.

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Books Received

Quest for Oneness. *Swami Ramanujananda*. Ramakrishna Math, Puranattukara, Thrissur 680 551. E-mail: srkmts@sancharnet.in. 2005. 120 pp. Rs 20.

Call to the Nation. *comp. G C Agarwal*. G C Agarwal, 11A/1 Sunny Park, Kolkata 700 019. E-mail: gc@uniqueinternational.com. 80 pp. Rs 55.

Reports

New Mission Centre

A new branch of the Ramakrishna Mission, named *Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Vadodara*, has been started at Vadodara.



Dilaram Bungalow

The Dilaram Bungalow in Vadodara, where Swami Vivekananda had stayed in April 1892 as a guest of Sri Manilal Jashbhai, the then Dewan of Vadodara, was handed over to the Ramakrishna Mission by the Government of Gujarat in April 2005 on a 30-year lease. Sri Narendra Modi, Chief Minister of Gujarat, handed over the keys and official documents to Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, at a colourful function held at the Gandhi Nagar Sabha Grih on 18 April (Ramanavami) in the presence of a large number of government officials, distinguished citizens and other invited guests.

Swami Shivamayanandaji, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, read out the messages of Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and gave a short talk. Several dignitaries and a good number of devotees at-

tended the function.

The address of the centre is: Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Dilaram Bungalow, Opp. Circuit House, R C Dutt Road, Vadodara, Gujarat 390007 (Phone: 0265-5554343; E-mail: rkmvmv@rediffmail.com).

News from Branch Centres

The consecration on 24 February of the new Sri Ramakrishna temple at **Ramakrishna Math, Dhaka**, was briefly reported in the May 2005 issue of *Prabuddha Bharata*. As mentioned therein, the different functions in connection with the temple dedication extended over four days, from 23 to 26 February.



Front view of the new temple

The vastu puja was performed on the 23rd by Sri Harinarayan Bhattacharya and Swami Tattwavidanandaji, Principal, Vivekananda Veda Vidyalaya, Belur Math. The inaugural session began with Swami Smarananandaji lighting a lamp. The second session consisted of a youth convention, the topic of discussion being 'Swami Vivekananda and Youth Responsibilities in the Present Social Context'. Discourses by a group of learned speakers on 'Swami Vivekananda and His Love for Humanity' comprised the third session. On the 24th, Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakri-

shna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, dedicated the new temple with its marble image of Sri Ramakrishna, and Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj inaugurated the religious procession, in which thousands of devotees took part. The next session saw the release of the



The religious procession

book *Swami Vivekananda ebang Tar Shishya o Samakalin Anuragivirinda* by Bangladesh Minister of State for Religious Affairs Janab Musarref Hossain Sahjahan. The rest of the session was devoted to discourses on 'The Speciality of Sri Ramakrishna in Religious Life'. 'Sri Ma Sarada Devi: The Mother of the Age' was the theme of the women's convention that was held on the morning of the 25th. The topics of discussion for the next two sessions were 'Sri Ma Sarada and Present Women's Society' and 'Sri Ramakrishna's Message for World Peace'. On the last day, the 26th, there was a devotees' convention, an inter-religious conference and a concluding session with discourses on 'The Contribution of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda for the Good of the World'.

A galaxy of intellectuals—men and women, lay and monastic—who took part in the discourse sessions made each session a success. On all four days devotees were also treated to a variety of cultural events that were judiciously inserted in between the discourse sessions.

On 27 February, Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj inaugurated a new multipurpose hall

at **Ramakrishna Mission and Ashrama, Sylhet**, and addressed a meeting held on this occasion. Janab Badaruddin Ahmad Kamran, mayor of Sylhet, also spoke. Revered Maharaj also laid the foundation stone for a students' home at **Ramakrishna Mission, Dinajpur**, on 4 March, and declared open the centre's new school building in Khochna the next day.

Ramakrishna Mission Shilpamandira (Saradapitha) celebrated the concluding phase of its golden jubilee on 18 and 19 March. Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj inaugurated a technical exhibition organized on the occasion and a new multipurpose hall. Swami Smarananandaji presided over a get-together of the teachers, staff and students.

Swami Suhitanandaji, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated a new toy house at the kindergarten run by **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Katihar**, on 20 March. The event was a part of the centre's Ramakrishna birthday festival and annual prize distribution ceremony which began on the 18th. The 3-day function included religious meetings and attractive cultural programmes. Swami Suhitanandaji presided over the ceremony and Sri Ramprakash Mahato, ex-education minister of Bihar, was the chief guest.

Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj inaugurated the new charitable eye-care centre 'Sarada Netralaya' and an extension of the dis-



Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj at the diagnostic centre

pensary with a well-equipped diagnostic centre with all major departments at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Patna**, on 25 March. On the 27th Revered Maharaj released a new book, *Tribute to Holy Mother*, published by the centre. The centre recently adopted 30 poor girl children with the intention of providing them free education for the next five years.

Swami Smarananandaji laid the foundation stone for the proposed higher secondary school block at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda**, on 23 March.

Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj inaugurated a new building comprising a monks' quarters and an office block at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Jalpaiguri**, on 27 March.

Ramakrishna Mission, Rajahmundry, served buttermilk and drinking-water sachets to 49,500 pilgrims over five days during the annual festival of a local temple in March.

Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj declared open a new eye-operation theatre at **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Muzaffarpur**, on 3 April. He also inaugurated the newly built monks' quarters at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chapra**, on the 4th.

Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj declared open the Vivekananda Institute of Value Education and Culture at **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot**, on 10 April.

Swami Suhitanandaji inaugurated a new wing of the technical school at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Cherrapunji**, and three new school buildings of the centre in Kalibari, Jatap and Laitduh. He also laid the foundation stone for a proposed primary school in Shelapunji on 14 April.

Swami Smarananandaji laid the foundation stone of the proposed annexe to Shivananda Sadan (junior boys' hostel) at **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Purulia**, on 20 April.

Relief and Rehabilitation

Some centres of the Ramakrishna Math

and Ramakrishna Mission continued with their winter relief work by distributing blankets and clothing to needy people in February and March. Details of the items distributed follow: Agartala (150 dhotis, 405 saris, 60 children's garments), Belgaum (1000 blankets and 1000 towels), Bhubaneswar (1660 blankets, 250 saris, 50 kg baby food), Kamarpukur (512 blankets), Limbdi (200 blankets, 450 sweaters, 50 saris), Manasadwip (300 blankets), Medinipur (200 blankets), Raipur (150 blankets), Ranchi Sanatorium (33 saris), Tamluk (500 blankets) and Vijayawada (151 saris).

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Puri, distributed in March and April, 112 saris, 21 dhotis, 103 *lungis*, 110 towels, 89 blankets, 100 mats and 100 sets of utensils among 110 families of Kanarpur and Gadatara villages in Khurda district whose dwellings were burnt down in a fire accident.

In April, **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, distributed 30,000 shirts and 716 school kits among other things to tsunami victims in Kanchipuram and Nagapattinam districts. It also distributed 285 boats, 31 sewing machines, 1 bicycle for a disabled person, and 104 plots of land, thus helping 813 families.

During the same period, **Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kalady**, gave away 16 2-seater catamarans, 1 mechanized boat, 900 kg fishing nets and other fishing gear. 187 families were benefited.

The Batticaloa sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo**, distributed 35 bicycles, 9 fibreglass boats equipped with fishing gear, and 14 sewing machines among tsunami-affected people.

Ramakrishna Mission, Port Blair, distributed 37 kg milk powder, 5 kg baby food, 38 dhotis, 66 *lungis*, 938 shirts, 95 shorts, 243 vests, 120 drawers, 1021 saris, 262 *salwar kameez* sets, 295 maxis, 128 towels, 4 mats, 148 bed sheets, 14 blankets, 6 mosquito nets and 46 sets of utensils among tsunami victims at different places in and around Port Blair. ~